



Isaac Torres

Objects for Deployment

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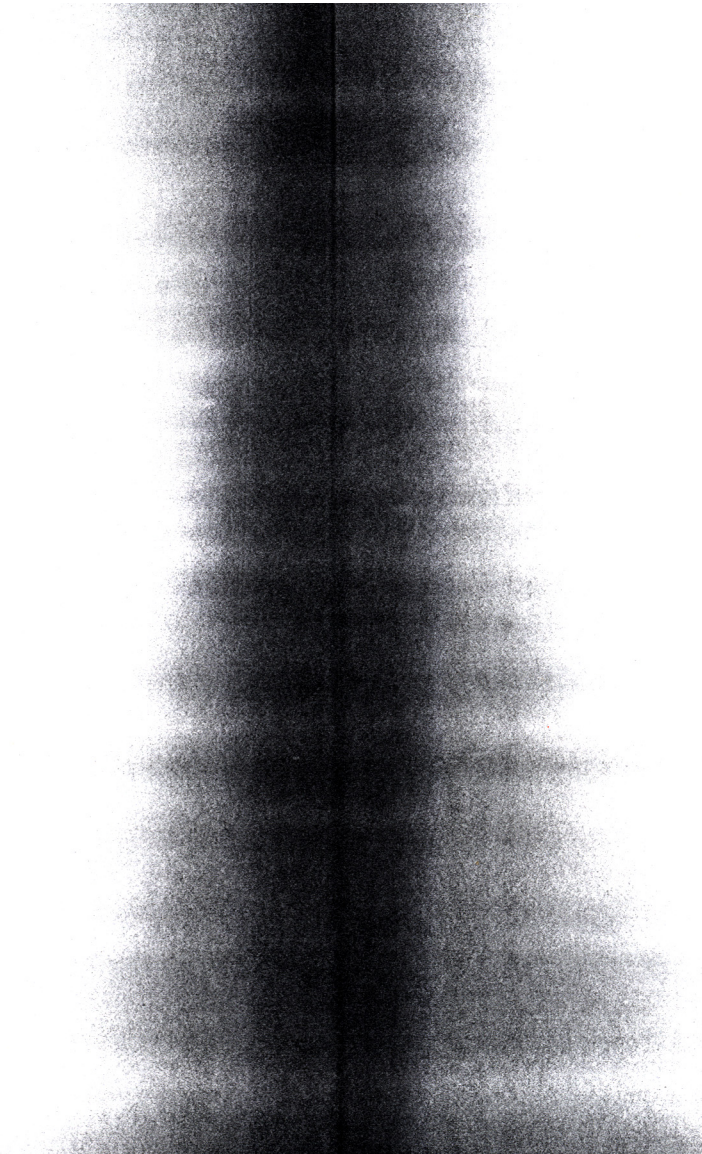
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WOUNDED WARRIOR
PROJECT

I was born and raised in Waco, Texas. I was born 5 August, 1975 to Debra Garcia and Mike Torres. My parents divorced when I was one and a half years of age; my mother remarried to Lupe Galvez. At the age of five I began experiencing sexual molestation by Stepfather (Lupe). Further on, from eight until thirteen years of age I experienced physical, mental and verbal abuse from Stepfather (Lupe). At the age of fourteen I was out on my own, living with friends and family members for weeks or months at a time and never had a stable home until the age of twenty. I worked with Uncle Jesse who owned a carpet cleaning service, but was paid very little. About the same time, I began to see my biological father regularly, but never formed a bonding father/son relationship. I dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade to help support my family by working (because at that time I was living with my mom and younger sister for a while but not long term). I completed my GED in June of 1996; shortly after, my girlfriend and I found out we were expecting a baby, which was a surprise. In 1998, I began attending Texas State Technical College in Waco, Texas.



I majored in Integrated Digital Image. The last semester of school, students were told the entire course needed a software upgrade and either we start the program over from the beginning to learn the new software, or pursue other options for education. I transferred to McLennan Community College to major in vocal performance for three and a half years. Meanwhile, Linda and I (my daughter's mother) were on rocky ground and had split up. Because of her busy work schedule, I had most of the responsibility for raising Brionna, my daughter. Going to school for music and being a single parent was a lot to handle, so I changed my major to social work. I attended Baylor University in Waco to get some general education classes completed. In 2003, Linda and I decided it was best for Brionna's stability if we legally established our daughter's custody in the courts. We were awarded joint custody and have equal responsibility in raising Brionna. Linda eventually married a soldier stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, which is fifty miles south of Waco.

The time Brionna and I shared together became limited, so I began to speak to an Army recruiter to see what my options were with coming into the Army and being stationed at Fort Hood. I was able to get my first twelve months at Fort Hood in my contract with the Army, so I agreed to go through training. After my eighteen weeks of army training, I reported to Fort Hood and was near Brionna again. We have a very strong father/daughter relationship and bond and it was very tough for both of us being away from one another. Soon after I arrived to Fort Hood, I received word that our unit was being deployed to Iraq. I had an experience during my time in Iraq: mortars, IEDs, combat. I was actually medevaced out of Iraq towards the end of my tour. A small combat situation left my knees injured. Over the past few years, I have had five surgeries on my left knee and one surgery on my right knee. I have been diagnosed with PTSD/TBI/depression/and anxiety disorder. I have also been diagnosed with sleep apnea, which has me on a CPAP machine while sleeping at night.

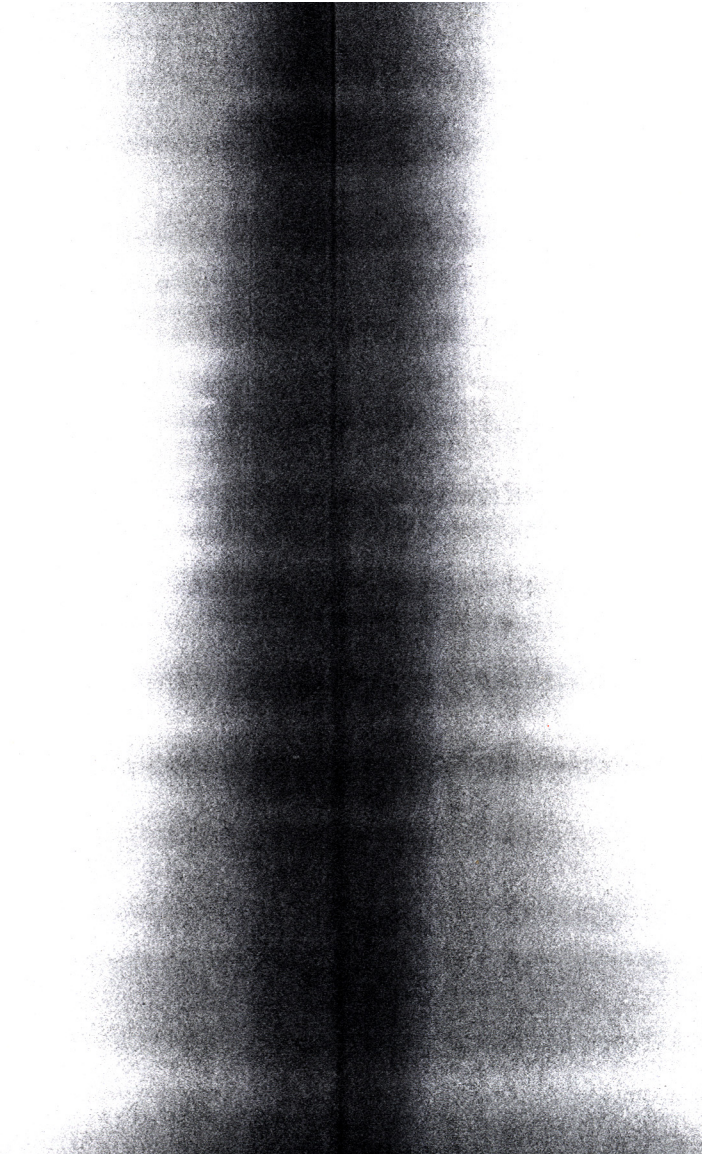
I have developed a speech impediment from the PTSD/TBI, my speech is stuttered or long and drawn out at times. I have been involved in many therapies: EMDR, in-patient behavioral health programs, LearningRX, biofeedback, massage therapy. I have meetings with my psychologist and psychiatrist and social worker. Each of these therapies has been helpful in its own way, but art therapy has been the most beneficial. I spent four years at Fort Hood going through deployments, but that was okay because I felt I had accomplished my goal of being in my daughter's life and that was the most important thing to me. I have always been there for Brionna, since the day she was born. Then came the time that Brionna's stepfather was picked up on assignment to Fort Carson, Colorado. Again, Brionna and I were separated. I spent this time going to school for a semester to get some general education classes out of the way and reenlisted in the Army. Still, there was that longing for my daughter to be in my life, so I began the process of getting myself to Fort Carson.

I sat down with my Command Sergeant Major of the 49th Transportation BN at Fort Hood. He had always liked my work ethic. He saw me as an outstanding soldier in his battalion, so he offered his help to me. Within the next few days I got a phone call with my orders for reassignment to Fort Carson. After a few days the paperwork was processed and I was on my way to Fort Carson, Colorado to be reunited with Brionna once again. The reason I am at Fort Carson is because I was placed in the Worriers Transition Unit (WTU) for recovery from combat knee injuries and also for other therapies I am receiving for my PTSD and TBI. Brionna and her mother and stepfather have now been stationed at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

I'm here and she's not.



What is wrong with me?



We have all heard the stories of war at some point or another. We have heard about the horrible images that military service members experience, the endless nights that run into days. The spoils of war, the consequences that our service members face once they experience bloodshed. These are moments that can blow a person's mind. Literally. Almost daily, with IED explosions, mortar attacks and grenades being hurled at you. You have fears. Will you ever get out of the chaos? Will you ever make it home alive? No matter if the cause for war is legitimate or political or simply humanitarian, service members place themselves in circumstances that are overwhelming because they believe in a worldwide resolution to conflict. What happens when a service member finally makes it through this yearlong storm, when that plane finally touches down on that blacktop?

They are greeted with smiling faces, cheers and praise from a crowd of people that are simply grateful to see their fellow Americans home and away from the hostilities. They say that it takes six to eight months after returning from war for a service member to begin to experience symptoms of emotional trauma. This is the aftermath. The body settles back into civilized life away from battle; then we can see how the soldier's emotional state really is. Some may feel withdrawn from family members; some may experience paranoia or hypervigilance. In my case, I returned with mixed emotions and anxiety disorders, major depression. I even developed a stutter in my speech. Suddenly, I was on overload, my brain running at a faster pace than I can handle. I can't explain it. When I first felt this I had no clue what the heck was going on. One day my life was normal and the next there was no direction.

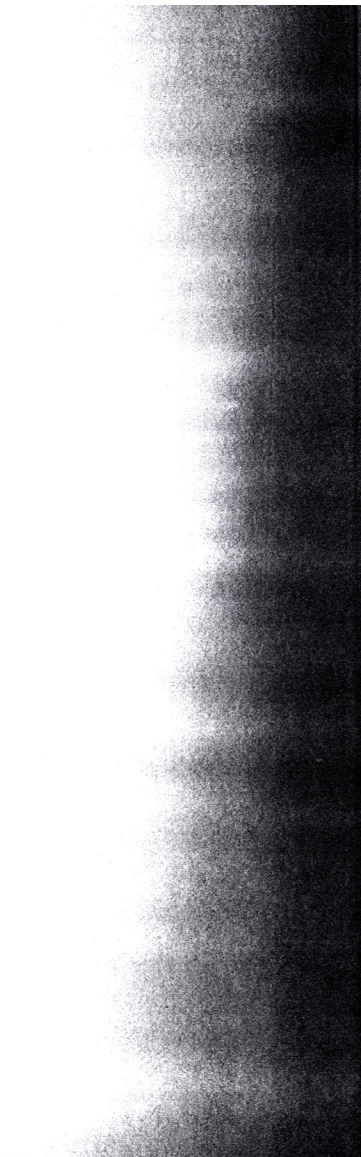
The symptoms settle in.

Patience

I want everything to come out quickly but I have to wait, go through the process.

Is my life starting over? Am I learning how to walk in the world again? My invisible injuries seem to hurt more than my physical injuries. Wow, this is a workout.

I can explain my stories for deployment. It's pretty much the same for most everyone. I'm pretty sure you've heard some horrible ones. My time at home seems worse than being in combat. Ask many soldiers, and they want to be back in combat. You build that camaraderie, that understanding with other soldiers. When you are home you don't know how to deal with what's happening to you, don't know how to explain it. It's all new to you. I'm not sure how to get this feeling into people's awareness, into the public's awareness.



I know I'm not insane, yet, why do I feel on edge, so worn down? "Daddy, are you ok? Why are you crying?" Brionna, I feel different, thank you for letting me know.

I think to myself: Life is good for me.

I'm alive. I'm breathing.

So why am I feeling this way?

Why can't I laugh?

Why can't I smile?

Why can't I express myself without having this intimidating look on my face?

It scares people.

It's not me.

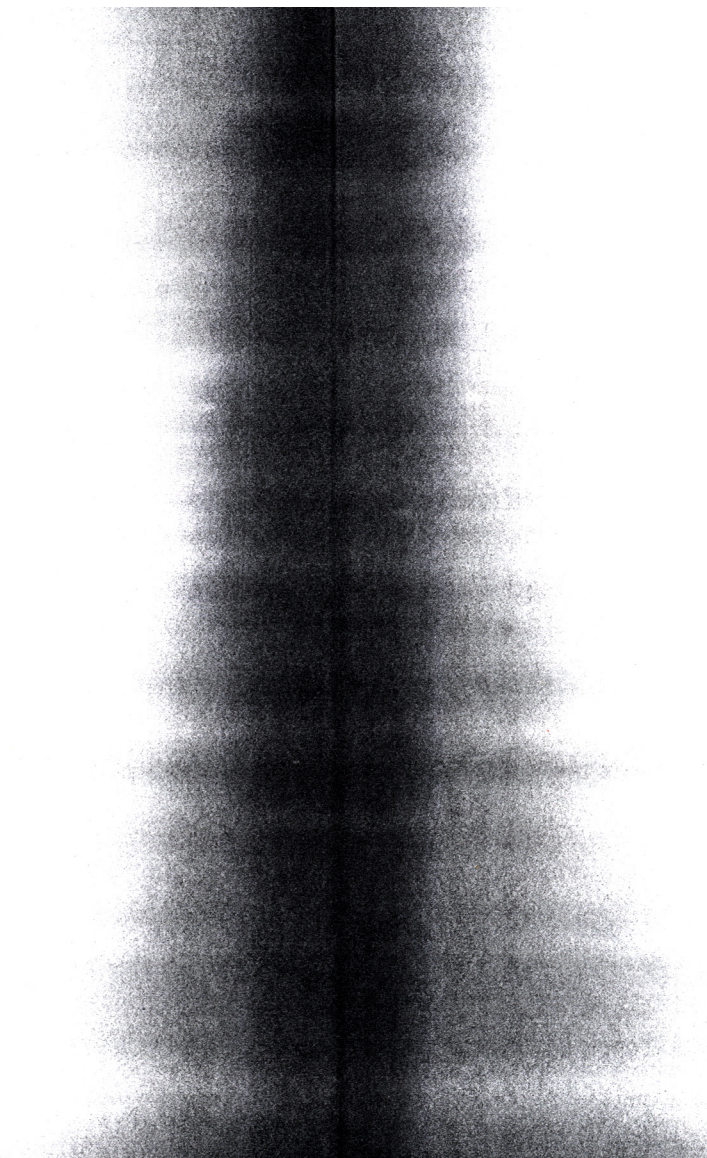
I'm trying to communicate certain emotions that service members deal with when they're trying to come back.

SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

We worked eighteen to twenty hours per day. It puts a lot of strain on your body and strain on your mind because you're sleep deprived. Your concentration goes crazy.

HYPERVIGILANT

When you're in a hostile situation for a long time, your body gets used to that. It's ready to react at all times. When I was deployed I was on the border. I was in crowds. Now, I can't be in crowds. I can't have someone walk too close behind me, or have someone drive too fast on the same road as me. Driving on the interstate when big diesels come up next to me, is a fear factor for me. When you return from war you're like a short fuse; you're ready to react, to explode.



NOISES

Sharp fizzing sounds, like from aircraft, sound like rockets that are being deployed. The rumble of the ground by, say, a fire truck. That's just the shakiness that comes with explosions. These loud noises, loud music, bass, heavy bass in car sound systems is like hearing an explosion. Not that I want to, but hearing these noises makes my body go into a defense mode. Nobody is thinking about that, my condition, when they're into their own thing.

For example, we were at this park in Texas.

My body begins to shake.
My body begins to sweat.
My body tenses up.

I approached the man politely and asked if he could turn the music down.
He asked why and I said, "I don't want to go into details, but my body can't handle it."
He turned like he was going to walk away.
And then he turned and punched me in the jaw with his bottle. I was stunned. I asked, "Why did you hit me?" He said, "Because I don't care about you." It was a real wake up call for me. I told him that I wanted to try to explain. I wanted to make him see why I wanted the stereo turned down. I told him, "I'm coming back from deployment and I've been diagnosed with PTSD. And all these sounds just sent my body off." He responded, "I don't care, I don't care who you are or what you've been through, I don't care about you."

PTSD and TBI

I have ringing in my ears.
I have vertigo.

All of these symptoms are close ringers to both PTSD and TBI. If I have TBI, I want to get help for TBI. I don't want to slowly go into dementia because someone has misdiagnosed me. I want to get the help I need. I plan on living for a long time.

From the military, to Congress, to the leadership of the United States, soldiers not getting the proper help they need is a big issue. I believe lack of care contributes to the high percentage of suicides.

Everyone thinks that the professionals in the field of psychology will be able to help them out. But somewhere, the system is low-balling people's diagnosis to save money. Now I have memory loss; my brain doesn't function as it used to.

TRUST

I feel I can't trust anyone.

I'm pretty sure that has to do with just being surrounded by people I wasn't sure of.

I think about who I was before – a lively, social, open person. I was always in school and researching. I used to be able to sit down and write, type – whole essays were easy... I don't get in those spurts anymore.

My mother and family knew I was this bright, vibrant, educated guy. I'm different now.

I cried for the first time the other day; I was going on three years without crying.

I feel like I'm numb.
I have no emotion; I have no feelings.

Someone can come up to me now to tell me, "This thing happened to me, it was such a tragedy." I'm thinking to myself... OK. I don't show any emotion, or comfort them. I can't help them see the brighter side of things. Or I can't express myself according to their feelings.

A lot of people say the medication I'm on has numbed me. They say maybe that's why I'm such a zombie.

I don't think so, maybe they are right.

Because of the disappointments I've been through, I don't expect any good from people.

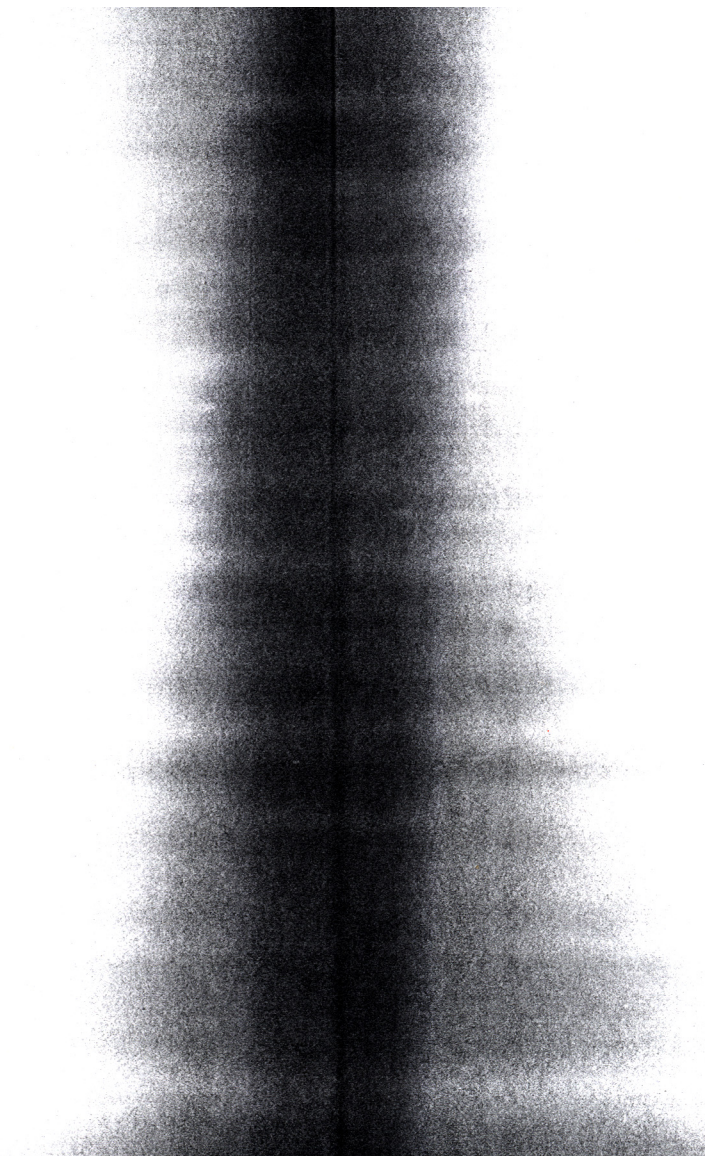
RELATIONSHIPS

I want others to understand: this interferes with my relationships.

I don't exactly like to tell women that I've been diagnosed with PTSD and mild TBI. It's been put out into the media that people with these conditions – or people like me – are violent.

I'm not at all violent. No woman wants to get involved with a soldier, current or past.

Mom has no clue how to reach out to me; she doesn't understand. I see the sadness and frustration so I stay away. I don't want to continue to worry them.



A STRUGGLE FOR STRUCTURE

What am I going to do without the military and the structure military service gave my life?

Depression sets in.

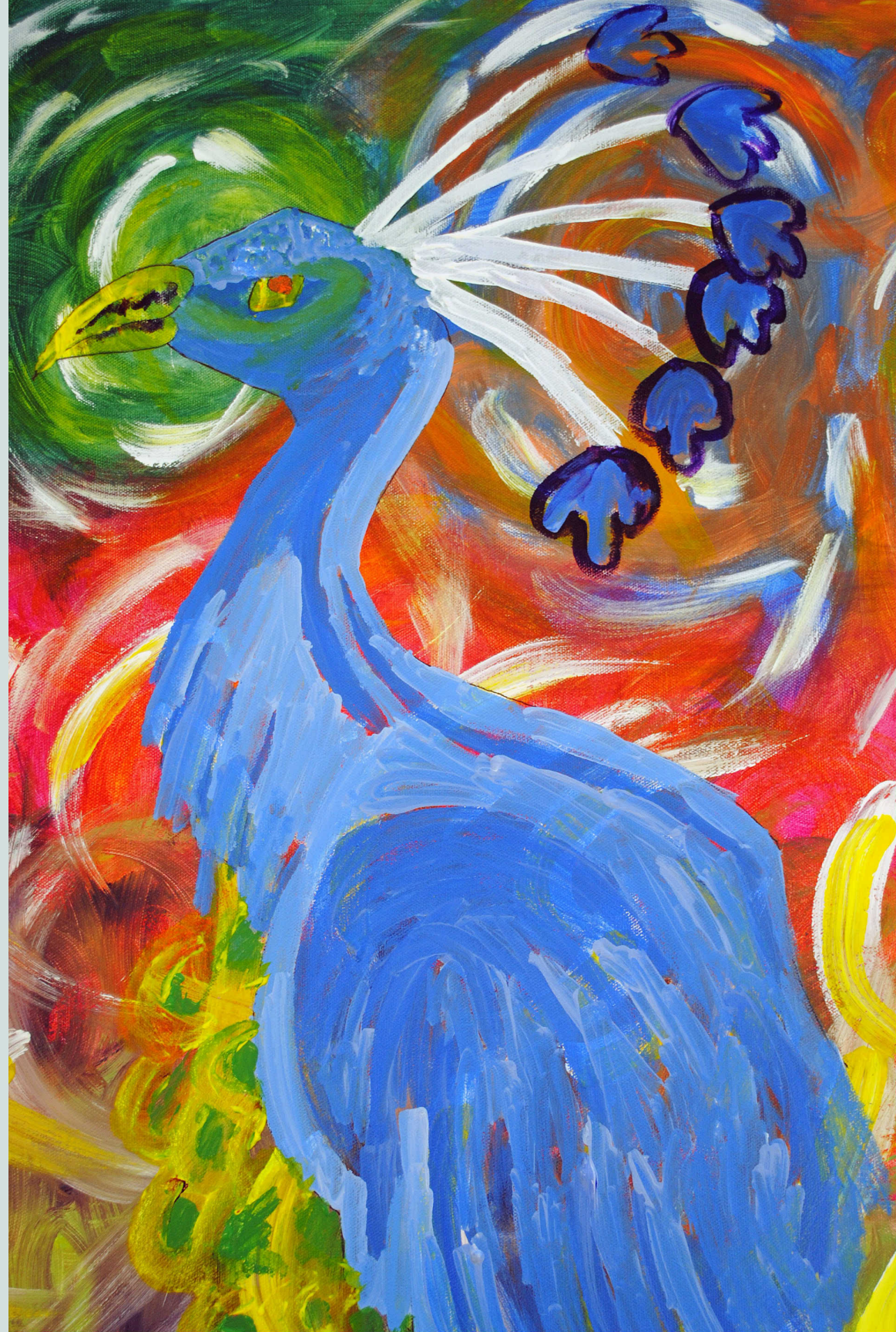
These past couple of days, I'm sad, I'm down. It's hard for me to understand why I'm feeling this way. My separation from the army was just a couple of weeks ago. Now, I'm medically retired.

This is the biggest challenge for me right now. How do I find structure?
How do I find a destination?
How do I find self worth?

What happens now?



Still, there is pride in the midst of chaos.



This is my brain.



Looking at a big dog like him, you would be intimidated if you didn't know his nature.

It's like me. I'm a pretty laid back, gentle person myself. When you look at me, you might not know that. I give off a look of attitude.

I'm not mean. I'm not violent. I'm not crazy.



This soldier and I were talking one day, and I said I always pictured myself as a little fat kid.

I interpreted the fat kid painting series as a new beginning, a way of starting over.

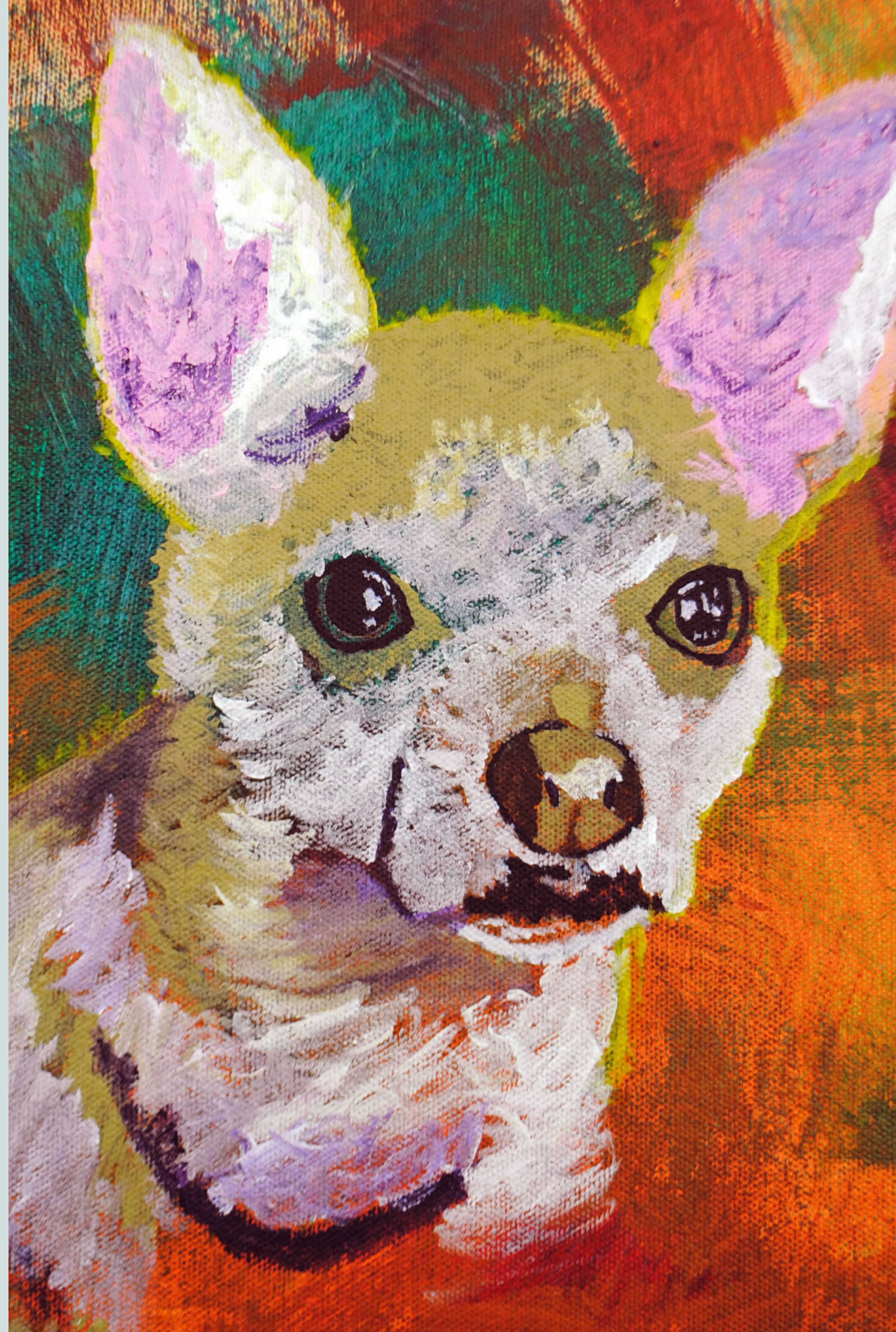
I think it's a subconscious way, even though I have this straightforward demeanor, I'm bringing out a more sensitive side.

Before coming into the Army, I was just a normal kid, just like other people and other people in the Army, too.

You come out of combat training thinking you're invincible. But reality shows different; anyone can be hurt.



Comfort



Serenity



Unmasked



Restoration



Faith



Simple Humility



All my paintings are a way to move forward.



COLOPHON

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Monica Haller

BOOK BY
Isaac Torres

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We made this book for listening. Please accept our invitation. We made this book for deployment. Please pass it along and invite someone else to listen.

Thank you,
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Isaac Torres served on active duty Army from 2004 through 2011; he was medically retired due to visible and invisible injuries, including PTSD, TBI and combat knee injuries in Iraq. Isaac was deployed with the 49th Transportation Battalion out of Ft Hood, TX. His responsibility was as a Movement Control Specialist, distributing Equipment and supplies and troops into different parts of Iraq. He served in Baghdad and moved through different FOB sites such as Balad, Al Asad, and Trebil, Iraq.

Isaac currently resides in Colorado Springs, CO where he is involved in the Military Creative Expressions art therapy course at Bemis School of Art. This is an art therapy class designed for service members that suffer from PTSD/TBI. He also volunteers with Aspen Pointe in their art therapy program. He is enrolled in school for Web Design, which will begin May of 2011. He is also in the process of opening a coffee shop/art gallery to help others that have suffered from PTSD. Expose Your Art will follow in the footsteps of art therapy and will promote all service members coming back from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan but will also be open to the public. For more information about this coffee shop, his current and future work, visit his website at www.exposeyourart.com

