

F1: [00:00] You can just start by reading your cards.

SUSAN SHARE: Hello, I'm Susan [Share?], 36 years old. Today is November 14th, 2015 and we are in York, Pennsylvania. And I am the daughter to Phil.

PHIL AVILO: Hello, I am Phil [Avilo?]. I am 73 years old, it's 11/14/2015 in York, PA and I am Susan's father.

SS: Dad, I wanted to ask you first, in less than one month, on December 7th, it will be 50 years since you were severely injured in Vietnam. You were only 23 and almost lost your life more than once and you returned home with an above the knee amputation of your left leg. How did that major trauma, do you think, shape the rest of your life?

PA: Well, let me make one slight correction Susan. I wasn't injured, I was wounded. Big difference. Your mother used to say, "Before his accident" meaning, like, getting shot, I would say, "Linda, it wasn't an accident, somebody was trying to kill me." Anyway, yes, it's been 50 years this coming December 7th. The remarkable thing of course is that it is on December 7th, this very famous day in American history, Pearl Harbor day. And for years, I've told people I'm a Pearl Harbor day survivor. And they say, "You're not -- you're old but you're not that old." And I say, "Well, I didn't say I survived Pearl Harbor, I said I survived Pearl Harbor day, which is a very clear distinction." Anyway, how did it transform my life is what you are asking. Well, not surprisingly, it was very dramatic and traumatic. Prior to the injury, the wound, I had been athletic, I had been an athlete, I was in the Marine Corps, I was used to running, that was part of the whole point to my life -- getting places on my feet physically and quickly. And suddenly that was over. But when they told me in a hospital that I might have to have an amputation cause it was a week after I got wounded that the leg was amputated -- I was relatively calm when they told me that and I remember saying to a nurse, nurse Sullivan, that "You win a few, you lose a few." It seemed to me that this was not going to make it -- I didn't see it being a life ending moment for me. That my life would go on and I would be able to deal with this. Some reason or another that it wasn't going to be resigning me to a life of

inactivity or anything like that. So the trauma of the wound was certainly big. And then I got the pseudomonas meningitis on top of that a week later and that's when I got a little concerned about my future -- once I heard my temperature and I was unconscious for I think about two weeks. When the Marines brought my father to the Philippines, as you know, it was a very amazing thing that they did and when I woke up he was there. So getting back to your original question, if I can, how did it shape my life? Is that what you said? In some ways, I think it infused me, strangely, with a confidence that I didn't have before. I'm not suggesting I didn't have confidence before but it was a different kind. It wasn't as mature, it wasn't as focused maybe, it wasn't as urgent. And now things had a sense of urgency about them in a different way than they did before. So I found myself, once I was walking and got myself ambulatory, I just left home. As I think you know about a little over a year later, I got in my car and drove to California. I wasn't able to walk. I had a leg that was very very poorly made and didn't work well for me. And when I got to California there were two things I had to do. I wanted to get another leg, one that worked, prosthetic leg. And get a job. And both of those things took place almost simultaneously. The VA in LA was very obliging and gave me the state of the art leg at that time. Make sure I had one that fit me well and make me mobile. And I got a job. And the job was the first area where I ever expressed this confidence. I called the man who somebody told me was hiring, Philips 66, employees. And he said, "Well, it doesn't sound like you have the kind of background we are interested in here." And I said, "Well, I think you ought to at least interview me." And he said, "OK." And I went in and I got the job so -- that was the beginning of me saying things like you "I think you ought to interview me, of course I can do that." And the job itself was a lot of standing up. I had to work in a service station for four weeks. Two separate two-week periods where I was on my feet for almost 10 hours pumping gas, cleaning windshields, changing tires. All that stuff. So I was getting confident in my ambulatoriness and then as I think you know I went on to coach briefly at UCLA with this brand new Lacrosse club the

following year. When we moved to San Diego, after your mother and I got married, I went to apply for a math job in the diocese in a Catholic High School and the hiring priest said, well, what they really need there is a basketball coach -- girls basketball coach -- "Can you do that?" And I said, "Of course I can do that." Of course I had never done it. But that's the kind of stuff that would have not have happened probably before this amputation.

SS: Wow, well, speaking of Linda -- your wife who you mentioned -- you have been married now 47 years.

PA: 47 years, yes.

SS: August 10th. I'm curious in all this when did you first meet her and when did you know you would marry her. Well, I first met her -- your mother was a navy nurse as you know -- and in fact last night we were out with some friends and one of them said, "Happy Veterans Day" to me and I said, "Well, don't forget Linda." Linda says, "Yes, everybody always overlooks me." But she was a Navy nurse and I was rehabbing at the Philadelphia naval hospital which she was stationed. I happened to -- I had seen her around I guess in the hospital but I don't recall if it was before or after this other incident. But I went to a party with another Navy nurse. She was my date and we went to this party -- the Navy nurses, some of them were having a party, they were having a party -- and I spied your mother there and I was drawn to her. Just visually. And really never forgot that moment. Didn't see her much in the hospital, it wasn't until -- that was in April 1966, I remember exactly when that was. Not the exact date although I tell her I remember when it was sometimes. And then next time I really saw her was at a large promotion party -- all these Navy nurses who had come into the naval hospital about the same time were giving themselves over to Navy yard and so I was talking with here and I think Jean Cleaver was there and we were talking with another Navy nurse. Then your mother and I started dating and I think I was pretty convinced right away that she was the woman for me. I

know I said to her before I went to California, "If I were going to get married now, you'd be the one." I'm sure she was just thrilled that I was so --

SS: Crazy?

PA: -- generous as to say I would marry her. But then I left. But she eventually came out to California with another nurse who had gotten out of the Navy when she did. And I thought she had come out to be near me but I don't think that was actually the case because we had some issues. But soon after she got there, she came out in the fall of '67 and we got married in August of '68. And it wasn't a really -- it wasn't a traditional wedding by any means in terms of what people do. They get a church, they get a hall, they get a band and all that. They invite all these people. Your mother and I got married in California at her mother's request. A very small wedding. I met her parents two days before the wedding for the first time.

SS: Wow. Very non-traditional.

PA: Yeah, but neither your mother nor I thought too much about that. Never occurred to us that it was different. And so I guess it was a good choice, for me absolutely. And I hope it was for her.

SS: OK, pause.

F1: Do you want to—sure.

SS: Dad, another thing that strikes me is something I can't believe that you went through is that less than a year after you were wounded [10:00] your mother died and she was only 45?

PA: She was 44, she was going to be 45 in about 10 days.

SS: And I wonder how that felt, obviously terribly sad, but I wondered about if you could talk a little bit about what that meant to you at the time.

PA: Well you are right. It was a very very sad year, especially for my father if you can imagine, who had travelled to the Philippines not knowing what that result would be. Knowing, I think at the time, that my mother had cancer. Something that I should

probably have known about but I was so preoccupied with myself that I never noticed the depth of her illness. My sister who's four years younger was getting married in November of 1966 to race to the altar to beat my mother's anticipated demise. And that didn't work. My mother died a month before my sister was married. So we had all of these things that were just -- what's happening here, how did this happen and how are we going to get through it. My father of course was still a young man, I don't know if he was even 50 yet and he had been through all this pain and suffering with me and now my mother was not easy either during the whole time of the illness. I was not there for most of that because I was at the hospital in Philadelphia, didn't get out of the Marines until August 31st. So I was really only home about five weeks when she died and it was just devastating to me. Perhaps because I wasn't even aware that it was that bad. I should have been. I knew there were episodes when we were visiting her in the hospital. But she died at home. She came home and I had actually been on -- I was going to the pharmacy to get some medication for her, a pharmacy I used to work at when I was in high school and the pharmacist who I had known since I was a teenager said to me, "Oh your mother doesn't need that anymore, we just got a call from your house, no need to pick it up." He said, "She has plenty of medicine or whatever." Whatever it was, I had no idea what he was talking about so I went home and my mother was dead. So it just -- I can almost visualize that now, her lying in the bed, my grandmother was there, it's even harder for a mother to see her daughter die.

SS: Can you tell me --

PA: After a few -- I tried to figure out a way to make things work for me in New York but I wasn't having any success and I was feeling overwhelmingly claustrophobic in some way, psychologically pressed with all this going on. Still couldn't walk, had no job, trying to figure out what I was going to do. And I just made a decision to take a trip to California, it wasn't like I was never going to come home. And I remember saying so long to my father in January that I was leaving, I went to see him at where he worked

before I pulled out. And he said, "You're not going to be coming back are you?" And I said, "Oh yeah, I'll be back." But he knew I probably wouldn't be. So I just continued -- it took a while to get there, I went by Florida, Kansas City and wound up in California and I guess I just turned my back on all that pain and suffering and said this is where I want to be, this is so much different than New York. Southern California. Living on the beach. Even if I didn't have a job that was a pretty good place not to have a job, beat being home in New York. And it forced me to have that independence that I would never have had I don't think. You ask me some other time about how did the amputation affect my life. I think, well, it forced me to be independent but it was an independence I couldn't achieve surrounded by family and at home where I had no mechanism or need to go out and rent my own house, my own apartment, cook my own food, do my own shopping, wash my own clothes, those kinds of things.

SS: Cause you had a lot of aunts and uncles around and --

PA: Well, not a lot but I was living in my father's house, my sister was there even though she got married. It would have been difficult for me to find the kind of job that I did to get the kind of a leg that I needed. All those things I don't think would have worked in New York. They might have but I can't visualize that. Did I answer your question? My father I think-- very hard for him -- but he would come and visit. Like every three months he would come out for a few days or a week.

SS: Oh, I didn't know that.

PA: He loved coming out there.

SS: Grandpa. Well, can you tell just a little bit of how you remember your mom as a child? I wish that, of course, I could have met her.

PA: Your mother never met her either so it's kind of interesting to see those things, how they happened. Well one of the things that I remember when I was still at Clark, in the Air Force hospital in the Philippines, one of the physical therapists that was taking care of me and they were just wonderful there. And I was getting ready to leave, it's after the

meningitis issue and the amputation and everything. And he said, "Now when you go home, your mother is going to see you and she is going to cry. Let her cry." I don't know if she did but I am pretty sure she did when I got home. What is the question we are working on now?

SS: Just a little bit about your mom, Grandma Rose.

PA: Well my mother was a doting parent with me. My sister says my mother doesn't even know if she was there. She doesn't say that quite -- I was the older son and she was kind of in the shadows, four years younger. But one of the things -- two things that are striking about my mother that I think testify to the way she treated me my whole life. When I was in Vietnam, she sent me a care package -- a couple of care packages -- I told her we had electricity where I was, so she sent me an electric popcorn popper. She knew I loved popped corn and oil so I had this little electric popcorn popper there. And then one day I got a little package from her which had a loaf of bread in in wrapped in Saran Wrap. French bread is what we called it, I don't know if they still call these things French bread or not. And I said, "What on earth is she sending me French bread for?" It takes a month for these packages to get here, it's going to be stale and I started unwrapping it and it was unusually heavy and there were crumbs in it and I was thinking, "What's all this about?" And I got it unwrapped and I noticed it had been cut in half and I took the top of it off and inside was a fifth of Johnnie Walker Black, my favorite scotch.

SS: Wow, what a mom. Oh my word.

PA: Yeah and when I got home she said to me she was very frightened because she knew it was against the law to send alcohol through the mail. She was afraid it would break and she would get arrested or something. I don't know but it didn't break and it was well preserved. Alas, I never did get to drink from it. I got shot a few days afterward and I think my friends did a good job I'm sure. The other thing is when I got to naval hospital in St. Alvin's in New York -- that's where they sent me originally. She came in that evening. Of course we had our tearful reunion -- I don't think I cried. I was home, I was

happy. I didn't even have tears of joy, I was just glad to be there. And the next day she came in, I was only there in that hospital for one day really. She came in with a huge platter of homemade lasagna that she began to distribute to the whole ward. All the marines that were even hospitalized patients there. So that was very typical of my mother. She always had an extra -- I could bring someone home completely unannounced and there'd be food. "Oh yeah, sit down, stay" I have a friend that I haven't seen in a few years now, maybe 2009 might have been the last time I saw him and he says he always remembers coming to my house because we used to room together for a while. Coming on Thursday nights for spaghetti and meatballs. Thursday night that was the dinner. My mother wasn't Italian, was not Italian.

SS: She was Greek.

PA: Greek and English but she did follow my father's family's tradition which was pasta on Thursdays and that was kind of the family meal. So that's the kind of thing she did. She was always there to take care of me in that way or anybody in the family. So it was a great family to grow up in. My father's side, my mother's side, my grandmother -- my mother's mother -- used to take me to Radio City Music Hall when I was a kid. I mean take me to this Cinerama, some kind of new -- before CinemaScope I think it was Cinerama. They took me to Palisades amusement park, the place that a lot of people remember from the song, [20:00] where I learned to swim. It was just an amazing family to grow up in. And my mother was the icing on the cake for me in all those regards.

SS: Well, you never complained, at least I've never heard you complain about being an amputee, but every now and then you would tell me that the one thing you always wished you could do and felt badly about was not being able to run with your three kids. We were always active and in sports. But the thing is, dad, is that figuratively you have run beside us in every aspect of our lives.

PA: Don't make me cry.

SS: You helped us reason through problems and gave us lots of tools to succeed and you've been our biggest cheerleader and given us so much love and support. And I wonder what have you felt as a father, what have been some of your biggest joys as a father?

PA: Well, you're right. I've told all of you that not being able to run with you was -- what's the phrase you used there?

SS: That would be the one thing that you felt badly about.

PA: I told you felt badly about it but really I was annoyed, annoyed as can be. When your two year old can out run you, that's not that much fun. Especially when you were a runner yourself of some sorts. But yes, it was a kind of thing that I never anticipated if I ever thought about being a father before I was wounded. I never anticipated not being able to run with children if I had them, or have them be able to run away from me so quickly. The one thing that I was happy though is that I could still out crawl most of you when you were six months old and that would keep you from getting to far away from me. The other part of your question was what highlights there are from your childhood?

SS: No, your being a father has been such a big part of your life. With three children and we are all grown. Do you have any specific feelings of -- what was maybe the most gratifying about being a dad?

PA: Well, just being one is very gratifying as you've discovered being a mother I'm sure. It doesn't matter what your child was doing, you have the child and that's the way it is. The most gratifying thing for me is, I think I'm most grateful for the fact that I had a profession that enabled me to be there all the time. It's extraordinary how much time we actually had together because I could make my hours. I could be with you in the afternoon, I didn't have to worry about being on the job and I could do my preparation and grading at night. The summers gave me more time and I had holidays with you. Yeah, I didn't miss a thing of your childhood. And I think that's the thing I am most grateful for. I never missed a thing for any of you that I can remember. And that is an extraordinary gift for a father, for a parent I should say.

SS: We definitely noted that. We know that you were always there. You don't remember this but you would always make me a special breakfast on days that I had a big event like a swim meet, or a cross country meet.

PA: Did I? I don't remember that.

SS: You'd make me a fried egg, your special fried egg.

PA: A fried egg sandwich? Oh yeah, they are great, do you know how to make them? You should make one for me sometime.

SS: Not as good as yours. Well let me move on here.

PA: Let me point out this other thing with being the father of you three children is all the coaching I did with you. But it gave me the confidence, once again we are talking about confidence here, not only that I could coach sports I never played like baseball, basketball and soccer but when you folks were no longer around I had no child to coach, that's when I turned to the Lacrosse team at your college and based on the fact that I had done that little bit of lacrosse at UCLA, I had done the University of Arizona team for three years, club team. I was positioned both in terms of my maturity and experience of coaching -- just how to organize practices, administer the team in all the ways and manifestations. I jumped into that and that became a great venture in my life as well with that lacrosse club and then going varsity for NCAA division 3 varsity at your college. So thank you for giving me the opportunity to coach you in sports that I never played other than pickup maybe.

SS: Yeah, and you were a lacrosse player in high school and college and, of course, York County never had lacrosse for any of the schools and especially not at York College and now it's everywhere.

PA: It is everywhere in the county.

SS: And a lot of that was your bringing to that.

PA: Well, people attribute that to me, it's really not accurate to say that. I started the college team, I had very little to do that. But I did point out there is a sport like this in the county

and the year after the first county league for high school kids began and then it just mushroomed to where some very enthusiastic lacrosse parents got involved and it spread county wide now. So I think every high school has it, both boys and girls lacrosse.

SS: Wow, I know that we, we your family, enjoyed seeing you being able to do that and the joy it brought you. Now I know sometimes Mom probably could have heard enough about it.

PA: Well she heard enough about it and one time I called her late from a practice that I had just locked my keys in the trunk, would she come and get me. And I don't know if she came that day or not. She came soon afterwards but -- long days and across town. But no, she was very very supportive of my lacrosse, very very supportive of it.

SS: She was. Well last year at this time you were dealing with non-specific of losing your strength. No one could seem to put their finger on it and after a myriad of tests and doctor visits you were diagnosed with ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease in March of 2015 and this is an incurable disease and I just wonder how have the past 8 months been for you?

PA: Well, it's more than incurable I've discovered. There is no known cause. It's incurable and there is no treatment. So there is nothing that anybody can do for you. I'm not saying I wish I had cancer or anything like that but they do have treatments for those. You know, you can treat it and you can actually cure it and you can, as you watch the TV ads, you can fight it. There is no way to fight this disease. One of the things that was the most -- I don't know if I want to use these dramatic terms -- but one of the most shocking things I discovered about it was that everything I was doing to try and overcome my weakness was counterproductive. ALS, if you say, "OK, I'm feeling weak, maybe I ought to lift ore weights or swim harder or do whatever you are doing, that just tears muscle down, which you are supposed to do in order to build it up. But when you tear down muscle with ALS it never comes back. So I was doing all of this -- I went on this weightlifting program, I was doing aerobics classes, I was trying to increase my

swimming efforts. I was really hurting myself. So that was the shocking thing to me and even today it's the one thing that -- with an illness there was always some way of overcoming it. Or an injury. There is no way to do that with this and it's taken me completely out of what I've done for all my life which is exercise. But when you have it like I have it -- when you have this disease like so many of us do, your reconciliation with reality is, I think, easier. Like, I used to play golf all the time and this summer I thought I would be playing all the way through now and then in the middle of the summer, after making adjustments on the golf course where I only played like half the course and selected holes I would play -- I couldn't even do that. And something I had just learned to love over the last 20 years we have been playing -- 25 years your mother and me -- I just walked away from it. Well not literally because I can't walk that well but I just -- I haven't missed it. You want to know what the last eight months have been like, is that what you are asking me? Well, chaotic because we've bought a house, sold a house, moved [30:00] all these things -- within two months I think we did all that. The thing that has been most compelling to me about the disease is how quickly my weakness has increased. And the thing that -- you didn't ask me this but I'll volunteer it -- that concerns me the most about it is losing use of my arms which is happening almost on a daily basis. So we are coping with it, I have a great wife. I have wonderful kids. I have friends all over this community who have been very helpful, who have driven me to Baltimore, drive me to Lebanon, driving me to Hershey. Taking me to lunch. Those kinds of things. The VA has been wonderful. Hershey ALS clinic has been terrific. I had the two high school friends down here Wednesday, Marine Corps buddy here on Tuesday. No wonder I'm tired.

SS: I know right!

PA: Out last night with friends.

SS: You are very hard to fit in a --

PA: I know, it's just terrible. We are month out now, it's ridiculous. To get a lunch with somebody during the middle of the week, I have to say, "Well how about next month, you know?"

SS: So some might say, "Gosh, this has been such a -- Phil has had such a poor hand dealt to him." And I've never really seen you thinking that but I wonder, how do you think you stay so positive? With this?

PA: Well look around you, look whose here. Look out there. It's not like I'm 25, you know. I think this disease is -- as insidious as it is -- is cruelest, and think all diseases are cruelest, when they hit younger people. If I were forty and you kids were young and this was happening to me, I would be beside myself. But the three of you, the three children are all happily married. Doing what they want to do for the most part. Great professions, living where they want to live. The person who is struggling more with this than anybody is your mother because it's just a real physical and mental burden for her. But she is the toughest person in the pot and she'll get through this and that's -- what am I trying to say here? I'm not even sure what --

SS: Just the one thing is that I just noticed that you and mom, as hard as it is, you still -- your having a lot of fun still.

PA: Oh yeah, I can't wait to get the van so I can pop my wheels in it and we can go to the mall. And I can go out for dinner and go to a bar and raise this wheelchair to bar level where I can see right in the eyes of the people standing next to me in the bar which is always going to be fun. So right now I am kind of restricted to the house but when we get the van which we should have in a month -- also being facilitated by the VA, the Veteran's Administration. By the way, I should mention for those who might not be aware of it, veterans get ALS one and a half to two times more frequently than the general population. That's why -- more like two times as much. That's why the Veteran's Administration has declared it a presumptive service connected illness. And they take very good care of us, I think they do. They certainly are taking good care of

me. And it flies in the face of all the criticism that they are getting which I think a lot of it is unwarranted.

SS: Well you have four grandchildren and a fifth on the way. How do you imagine they will describe you to their kids and grandkids?

PA: Oh, that's one I don't know if I can answer. I think you'll probably start by saying, "Dad never missed anything and weathered every storm." I hope.

SS: And gave us a lot of good books.

PA: And the grandkids?

SS: That's what I mean.

PA: OK, the grandkids. And now I'm reading their books because they are much more interesting to me than some of the other stuff out there. So any books the boys or [Evy?] or when Josh gets to that age where he can do it -- recommend to me I will definitely read. And whoever this next one is, assuming I have still some life left in me maybe we will have the same thing, we will see.

SS: Well, we've always -- I think that, for all of us, our love of reading and books we can trace right to you, and mom, but definitely you. Just love you very much.

PA: Well thank you, I love you.

SS: Oh dad, you have always told us so many funny stories. Well, some almost sad but you have to laugh or you'll cry. Could you just tell me again the story of [Hudspith?].

PA: Well, we are not mentioning names here.

SS: I didn't know that was his real name.

PA: I wanted to talk really, I think with the respect of this young man, maybe paint a picture of what it was like to be in the Marines in 1965, 1966 at the beginning of the Vietnam War. As you know I got there with maybe the second wave of Marines that set foot on ground on July 1st 1965, then wounded within six months. Meanwhile my roommate had been killed in the first battle I was in which has been with me, as you know from that recent piece I wrote, since the -- my entire life since that time. But when I was in the

hospital I met a lot of other wounded veterans, Marines. One of them I met was a young man who had -- was brought in to the PT room one day and he was on a gurney. He was pretty fresh into the hospital from Vietnam. I don't know how long he had been in route or if he had been in the Philippines. They were getting him out of country really quickly, I mean I was out of country same day, but they would get him on hospital ships and bring him to the United States almost immediately. Well this young man was missing two legs, one below the knee, one above the knee. He had shrapnel throughout his stumps and his arms, several digits missing from his right hand. And he was young, about 20 years old, a young 20 and he is lying on this gurney in the naval hospital therapy room and I asked him what, who he was. And he said -- he told me he was PFC blank. I don't want to mention his name here, he doesn't know I am doing this. And I said, "Well, I'm Lieutenant Avilo," and I said, "What happened to you?" And he told me stepped on a mine and that explained his legs and his arms. His left arm is a little protected because it was higher, he was just walking on the rifle like that. His hands up around his chest. So instead of -- and he was very very forlorn and depressed and you could just see it -- instead of doing something compassionate, I say, "Well, that's too bad." And I walked away. It was tough love. Nobody was going to say, "Oh you poor thing." You know? So I didn't do that but I wanted to take him out for a beer and Pennsylvania you had to be 21 to drink. And I'm thinking to myself, here is a guy who is out there -- kill or be killed -- he's desperately wounded, I could take him in my car, we could go out to have a beer and I can't do it in Pennsylvania so I took him to New York one time in my home. And we went to a local tavern, in fact one of the high school friends who was here the other day was with me that night, the other one was in California now. So the three of us took Jim -- I'll call him Jim, that was his first name -- took to Jim to a local tavern and we are drinking beer. And Jim said he had to go to the bathroom. So the fellow who was here the other night said, "Oh, I'll take you." And he took him over and a short time later he comes back, he said -- this is before the Americans with Disabilities Act -- he couldn't

get the wheelchair through the door. And I was still walking on crutches so I was of no use here. The other fellow, Charlie, said, "Well, I'll give you a hand". He left and I'm sitting there and suddenly there is this uproarious laughter coming out of the bathroom. And they came back and I said, "What is all that about?" And Pete said, "Well, I told Jim to put his left arm over my right shoulder and Charlie said, 'put your right arm over my left shoulder.'" And they sidled into the bathroom and got over the urinal and Jim couldn't get his equipment out. No one will tell me how that ever worked out.

SS: Oh my word.

PA: But Jim was laughing crazily over this himself and I thought of him almost every day after that. I had him at my apartment and I was living outside [40:00] the hospital for a little while. We had steak dinners and so I had been thinking about him for years and years and finally I located him through a lacrosse player of mine who had gone into the Marines and he found out where he was. And I called this number and woman answered, I said, "May I speak with Jim?" and she said, "Yes, just a minute." And Jim gets on the phone and I said, "Jim, PFC". He said, "Who's this?" I said, "Jim, PFC, Philadelphia naval hospital circa 1966." He said, "Yeah, whose this?" I said, "Phil Avilo" And remember I've been thinking of him every day for forty years or something and he says, "Who?" He doesn't remember me. I said, "I took you to New York and you were at my apartment." And he said, "Of course, I remember you. I never knew your name." And if you think about it, he identified himself as PFC with his last name and first name, I just said, "I'm Lieutenant Avilo." The state he was in, he's not going to remember that last name, he is just going to remember that I was a Lieutenant and he always called me Lieutenant, Lieutenant, Lieutenant. And I said, "What's been happening to you?" He said, "A lot." He got out of the Marines, he went back home to Tennessee. He drifted around for about a year which is very similar to me and then he went to University of Tennessee for a year, he got married, had to get out of town. He and his wife moved to Colorado where at the University of Denver he got a bachelor degree in elementary ed.

Then the marriage kind of dissolved. He went to graduate school for two years and got a special ed degree and now he's living in Minnesota and teaching. And I said, "Do you use crutches to get around? Are you in a wheel chair?" He said, "No I walk?" I said, "You use crutches?" He said, "No" He said, "in the classroom, in the building level, I can make it OK. If I'm on uneven terrain, out on the grass or something I'll use a cane."

SS: So he wears prosthetics?

PA: Yeah he has two prostheses. And then I said to him, "Do you drive?" I said, "Do you have hand controls?" He said, "No." I said, "You don't? How do you drive without hand controls?" He said, "I use my feet!" I said, "Jim, you don't have any feet." So here he is, he's getting ready to retire from teacher. Here's a guy worried about how is he going to do it. I had a college degree, I had one single bullet hit me and nothing else, no trauma, no long rehab. And this guy, somehow on his own, incredibly resurrects his life.

Teaching his two kids, getting ready to retire, had a great career. He was so typical of -- this is getting me sad. All the marines I served with.

SS: What a brave man.

PA: I was going to call him but I didn't get around to it. I had all these visitors, Marine Corps birthday and Veteran's Day but maybe I'll give him a call after this conversation. We talk every now and then, not often but every now and then. It's usually leaving messages and playing phone tag but...

SS: I'm glad you called him.

PA: Yeah. All these guys, so many of them who had been wounded -- amazing, terrible wounds -- have rebuilt their lives around the trauma and the disrespect -- not disrespect, I would say indifference which is worse than disrespect -- that Vietnam Veterans had historically. Little bit better now. But we were really on our own when we got back, there was nobody there. Jim Simmons, I'll mention his name, he was a very very good friend, we met in a hospital in Philadelphia and was with us, visited with us here in New

York about five years ago on Labor Day weekend, died several months after that from cancer. What was the point I was trying to make about this particular thing?

SS: Not getting --

PA: Oh, not having anyone there. Jim was intensive care for weeks and his wife was telling us, even when she was here the last time -- they were married then -- there was no place for her to sit. She had to sit on a chair in the hall and there was no facilities for them. The penance of wounded Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans, and I don't begrudge them this, they certainly should have that, they have facilities where the families can stay and the veteran can actually be in the room with them for care. So here is Jan sitting there in the hall waiting so she could go in every hour, whatever it was, when he was in the ICU on death's door himself, very very severely wounded. And well, not severely wounded but the infections that came after that were really the problem. And that's fortunately -- that's no longer there. But Jim resurrected his life -- Law school. And moved to -- went to Syracuse Law school, moved to Arizona. It's just amazing what these people have done. I was surrounded by people like that my whole life and continue to be this day. That's the kind of thing that keeps you going. You don't even think about the other parts. You just think about the good parts. Susan, thank you for this opportunity. Lauren, thank you.

SS: Thanks dad, love you so much. [00:45:53]

END OF AUDIO FILE