

Karl Tearney



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So I joined the British Army as a boy soldier in the early summer of 1983 after spending a short spell in horological design. I had always wanted to be a pilot and sadly had missed out large periods of schooling because of a few issues with my parents divorce and my moving from parent to parent.

I had joined the Army Air Corps and had to serve firstly on the ground before any application was allowed to apply for a flying role. It was late in 1990 that I attended the Aircrew section centre which at that time was in RAF Biggin Hill. I was so pleased when I passed and could then complete the remainder of the Army selection process before beginning my pilots course in 1992.

Upon completion of my course in 1993 I was chosen to then go straight to Operational flying in Northern Ireland. I had a tough 26 months and witnessed the harsh reality of terrorism seldom seen on the news. Its odd how when serving on the ground you become fixated on your patch of ground and rarely think of anyone elsewhere. But when in the air your responsibility becomes so much more.

So much of my time was spent hopping from incident to incident and never having the time to ponder on events as the tempo was so high. I remember getting very little sleep whilst there as my mind was awash with imagery and thought. Nobody spoke of any of the incidents afterward less a quick debrief at the end of the duty. The macho image of being a soldier entwined with the expectancy of being completely lucid because you are a pilot seemed nonsense to me but that was how we lived.

Just 5 months or so after Northern Ireland I deployed to Bosnia as part of the implementation force (IFOR) and I had no idea nor preparation for what was in store. Everything was a mess,

buildings, roads, power, water, and people were all in tatters. The things I witnessed still haunt me today and especially those involving children.

Upon my return I knew there was something wrong in my head and I sought help. The Army counselling team seemed unusually interested in my own childhood rather than my recollections of Northern Ireland and then Bosnia. I found that very frustrating and thankfully returned to work.

Various things that one might say are just part of life then happened over the next decade or so and I remained in the Army until quite suddenly I began to sob uncontrollably at night. I had no idea as to why but oddly I didn't tire from not being able to sleep. It carried on nightly for a month but then one morning my work phone rang and I couldn't talk, I simply began to cry and couldn't stop. That was my last day at work, as I then spent time in recovery including a spell as an inpatient in a mental health hospital.

Since then I have struggled to get better and perhaps even return to my old self as I missed the old me. I tried all sorts of therapy but each time it resulted in my feeling worse and being discharged as treatment intolerant. My problem is that I don't have a single point of trauma. I have nigh on 3000 flying hours of trauma stemming from many operational areas.

I concluded I would have to find a way to treat myself and turned to writing. I went for a short walk and wrote about a willow tree that was nearby. The words flowed into a poem, my first ever, and I've written almost every day since.

What has been remarkable about my story is that I realised I will never find the old me but the new one has a remarkable gift, poetry. I have now had some success including work at RADA, the Hay literature festival, promotion of poetry as therapy on the BBC News and the recently released RAF Centenary poem.

My work now spans all subjects and I have released a children's poetry book through the style for soldiers charity whom gave it free to all the children of the injured service people on the charities books. I ahem spent time at the second largest special needs school teaching them about how use of art and words can be fundamental to inner peace when struggling inside a torn mind.

I have attached a small selection of my poetry as a taster of my work

Alone

I'm all alone
An Army of one
Surrounded by people
I watch everyone
Everyone cares
Yet nobody knows
My darkening days
They just presuppose
Happiness fleeting
A life of unknown
An Army of One
I fight on my own

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Demon

I'm still fighting my demon
A daily fight for me
Sometimes I fight for hours
To oppose his trickery

My demon's getting stronger
I think he matches me
Each time that I'm about to win
He shows more bravery

I cannot run nor can I hide
He's just so slippery
The things he says so damaging
He loves bewitchery

You don't believe in Demons
You'll say you just don't see
But you might have met my demon
For he lives inside of me

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Underground

I'm lost in my own underground
The signs have all long gone
I wander round the corridors
Those journeys always wrong

I hear the trains come rattling by
They never ever stop
I climb and climb so many steps
Yet never reach the top

Sometimes I meet a plague of rats
They snarl and hiss at me
I turn around and run away
They laugh at what they see

Other days the lights go out
I grope around the dark
Hands touch things that frighten me
My terror now so stark

There are some days I see a train
I see you all onboard
You wave at me and shout hello
My screams for help ignored

So next time that you're in the tube
And you see that platform bare
Take some time to look for me
As you'll see me standing there

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Learn from me

Darkened vacuums fill my soul
My blood now rusty red
My heart so full of loneliness
Inside my head is dead

I write these words in solitude
Sat by my willow tree
The place where I record my life
To escape in poetry

I hope that one day, when I'm gone
My soul will shine for you
To help you reach into your soul
Then focus on your view

For life should be so beautiful
Not one of endless pain
So reach out for your happiness
Then dance amidst the rain

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