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Soldier brings other veterans to Nashville to find peace through songwriting

by Alex Apple
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PHOTO: CREATIVETS

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (WZTV) — Richard Casper, originally of Peoria, Illinois, was a different Richard when he came back from war in Iraq. The previously outgoing, bubbly personality felt alone and uneasy in crowds.

"My buddy was shot and killed beside me. I came home with a brain injury," Casper explains. "I didn't know how to live with myself. I went from being class clown, prom king, talk in front of

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Unsure of what was going on in his life or his mind, Casper sought relief but never knew where to find it until he took an art class at an Illinois community college.

"It ended up changing my life," Casper explained.



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.@CreatiVets1 and its founder Richard Casper help veterans tell their painful story through creative expression. Casper flies veterans to Nashville for free to tell their story through songwriting w/ some of best writers in town. They have 170+ veterans currently on a waitlist.



Alex Apple
@AlexApple_

Casper's own story is a source of hope for veterans. Casper returned from Fallujah with such anxiety, he was a shadow of his former personality. Through art and songwr ting, he found a way to tell his story w/o 'having to tell his story.' He is a powerful mentor to CreatiVets.

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Through art and creative expression, Casper could tell his story without telling his story. He explains that phenomenon like this, "Students would come up to me and be like, 'you were with your buddy when he was shot and killed.' I'd be like 'how'd you know that?' 'Well, you put red in this piece and you as artist, it makes me think that you were there and saw his blood or you were angry about his death.' I'm just like 'I didn't tell you a word.'"

Casper knew he had found relief and something phenomenal that he wanted to share with others that shared his pain. From that moment, **CreatiVets was born**. The organization, now six years old, helps veterans deal with PTSD and brain injuries through creative outlets. In Nashville, songwriting is the top outlet.

Dad gives daughter best gift ever



"I said, 'what if I had a song that I could just give to someone and walk away when they asked about Luke [his best friend killed in Fallujah], then I wouldn't have to say a word but they would know his story,' Casper explained in his 20th floor We Work office. "What I'm trying to do is get veterans to switch from their combat brain to their artist brain."

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Casper said, "Every time a veteran goes home with a song, it just builds me up a little bit more."



CreatiVets also does creative writing with soldiers and visual art as well. Casper has more than 170 veterans currently waiting for the opportunity to come to Nashville. Monday, he met with other veterans and the governor to express how the state could better support their efforts. The event was put on by Bunker Labs which helps veterans grow their businesses after their time in uniform is over.

Working with some of the best songwriters in town helps the veterans brainstorm what their song should say, and then the songwriter or an up and coming artist will put that song to music and sing it.

[Learn more about CreatiVets here.](#)

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