

North Jersey Media Group (*The Fort Lee Suburbanite, The Edgewater View, The Leonia Life*)

A Soldier Discovers and Pursues His Passion

By Jay P. Granat, Ph.D. – a psychotherapist in River Edge, NJ.

I have counseled a number of soldiers who have returned from Viet Nam, Afghanistan, Iraq and the Gulf War. Unfortunately, many of these young men and women return with a myriad of psychological, emotional and physical problems. The suicide rate, the incidence of substance abuse and psychological disorders is exceedingly high among this population. And these veterans frequently come to therapy with some rather complicated lives.

The media have devoted a fair amount of attention to the poor care that some of our veterans have received after returning from combat. This lack of quality health care is definitely contributing to the problems that some of our veterans are experiencing. It is really upsetting to know that people who have risked their lives for our country are suffering and not getting the help they need.

That's why it is a real pleasure to meet someone who has returned from a war and been able to thrive, grow and flourish. Recently, I was lucky enough to have a lunch with such a person.

Michael Stefan Strozier is an amazing and I interesting fellow. He has written a number of books and plays. He is fascinated with language, ideas and the theatre. One of his books, *Theatres And Theater Companies of New York* should be of great interest to theatre goers, to tourists and to people who are curious about the history of New York. The book contains some classic black and white photos of New York's oldest and most famous theatres. It also has some fascinating facts about these venues.

Mike, as he likes to be called, also has a theatre company which has produced a number of off Broadway productions. One of his plays, *Guns, Shackles and Winter Coats*, deals with post traumatic stress disorder and war veterans.

Finding one's passion in life is a great way to recover from the wounds and trials and tribulations which one can experience in war. Mike Stefan Strozier believes that his love of writing helped him to build a fulfilling life after he returned from the first Gulf War.

Many returning soldiers have struggled with career issues and will continue to struggle vocationally especially if the economy continues on its downward trend. Veterans who are returning can learn a lot from Mike's example and it probably makes sense to help veterans to get on the right path by providing mental health counseling with a focus on positive career

development. These soldiers need to feel empowered and many need guidance to find the right career path.

Non-veterans can also learn a lot about the theatre and about the benefits of following one's passion from this former soldier.