



SongwritingWith:Soldiers.®

CHANGING LIVES ONE SONG AT A TIME

// One percent of the U.S. population serves in the military.

// Since 9/11, the U.S. has been at war—longer than any time in its history.

// Many veterans do not seek services after returning home from combat.

// An average of 22 veterans commit suicide every day.

SongwritingWith:Soldiers transforms lives by using collaborative songwriting to expand creativity, connections and strengths.

SongwritingWith:Soldiers holds weekend retreats for veterans from all conflicts. The first retreat was held in 2012 near Fort Hood, Texas with eight veterans. The bonding, the songs, the impact were so powerful that there was no turning back.



Since then, dozens of retreats have been held across the U.S. with hundreds of veterans and military families connecting, sharing their experiences and writing songs with professional songwriters. Their songs have been recorded and shared through thousands of downloads from our site, reaching and connecting more veterans and raising civilian awareness of the challenges the military community faces.

// OUR FOUNDERS



Darden Smith

Darden is an Austin-based singer-songwriter who has released 15 critically acclaimed albums in a career that spans over three decades. He continues to write and tour across the U.S., while exploring new and innovative ways to use the craft of songwriting in education, entrepreneurship studies and service.



SongwritingWith:Soldiers uses the craft of collaborative songwriting to build bridges between military and civilian communities. It helps us all go from a place of 'us and them' to one of 'us.' We take what are often difficult and painful stories and set them free, let them sing. I can think of no better way to serve others.



Mary Judd

Mary specializes in creative communications and positive psychology programming. She has written widely and developed custom programs for international clients including the founder of the Discovery Channel, India Association of Health Research and Welfare, MentorCoach, VIA Institute,

New York State, the *Happy Movie* and more. She is passionate about sparking strengths to inspire positive change.



It takes trust for a veteran to show up. We work hard to build trust by making genuine connections and setting an open tone. We then fuel the spark from songwriting with workshops and tools to relax, stay connected and flourish beyond the retreats. We witness the return of hope. What a gift. What a necessity!

We use collaborative songwriting to build:

CREATIVITY

Discover more possibilities

CONNECTIONS

Be part of a community

STRENGTHS

Gain resilience to move forward



*This retreat restored my faith in humanity.
People really do care.*

SERGEANT SCOTT MCRAE,
U.S. Army



*My family can hear my song and
understand what I've been through.*

SERGEANT JAIME SANTIAGO,
U.S. Army



OUR RETREATS //

SongwritingWith:Soldiers holds three-day retreats structured around songwriting,



creativity workshops and relaxation to foster ongoing positive connections. They are held in tranquil settings which provide a welcome gift for participants. The intimate size ensures a safe, caring environment and extended one-on-one time with songwriters.

To play off that songwriting spark, we offer workshops including photography, journaling and guided stress relief (yoga, meditation), as well as unstructured downtime—all designed to help veterans connect back to themselves, each other and the civilian world in a fun and genuinely inspiring way.

At every retreat, we employ a team of highly skilled photographers, videographers and recording engineers to capture all the songs, performances and activities and transform them into CDs, DVDs and photo lyric books that are sent to all participants. Positive memories are preserved and stories can easily be shared long after the retreat has ended.

// PROGRAM OUTCOMES

SongwritingWith:Soldiers is considered a groundbreaking program by post-traumatic growth researchers. We are helping to develop studies focused on how collaborative songwriting and positive psychology interventions can affect post-traumatic stress and overall veteran wellness.

- // **Over 50% of our attendees are referred by past participants. That number keeps growing.**
- // **Exit surveys show that veterans leaving our retreats feel more connected to others and would highly recommend the program to fellow veterans.**
- // **Our program further supports post-retreat growth with group calls, online forums, volunteer opportunities and in-person events.**
- // **We continue to expand our partnerships and offerings and have now held retreats in Arizona, California, Colorado, New York, Texas, Virginia and more.**



Whether we are returning to soldiering duties, family responsibilities or civilian life, there is no protected time or space to think about what you've been through. I was empowered to become a master of my experience, rather than to be a slave to it.

CAPTAIN REBEKAH LAYTON,
U.S. Army



“

Every veteran should have this opportunity!

CURT CAMPBELL, SSA

U.S. Marine Corps





“

Whenever I need a reminder of what I can do, I just push play.

SERGEANT JOSH GEARTZ,
U.S. Army





With nearly 400 songs written, the SongwritingWith:Soldiers catalog is a vital, growing collection of stories from contemporary military life in our country.

The stories are varied. Often difficult. Always honest. Whether

about combat and loss or the challenge and strength of keeping families close during and after deployment, the cathartic joy of releasing the stories through song is boundless. To do so through collaboration with a civilian is revealing—and transformative.

Each and every veteran gets to hear their song performed at the end of a retreat. They see others listening, feeling and relating to their song and they often say, “I thought I was the only one who felt this way.”

Their songs can all be found on our website where they can be heard, downloaded and shared around the world, allowing others to benefit from their powerful message.

// THE SONGWRITERS



SongwritingWith:Soldiers brings together professional songwriters who are masters in the art of collaboration. They bring years of experience to this work. Many of them have won Grammy awards, written #1 songs or had their songs on albums that sold millions of copies.

Here are just a few of our writers and the list continues to grow:

Radney Foster, Beth Nielsen Chapman, James House, Mary Gauthier, Ashley Cleveland, Gary Nicholson, Darrell Scott, Jay Clementi and Maia Sharp

Collaborative songwriting is powerful and demanding. Our songwriters take the service members' words, their stories and phrases and together with the participant craft the lyrics. Melodies are created on the spot. The participants want their story told. The writers want to tell the truth. The resulting songs are collaborations in the purest sense.

After the retreat, all the participants are registered with ASCAP as co-writers of their songs.



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My song turned out to be one of my most important achievements during my military transition into civilian life. It let me focus on my story, obstacles in life as well as reflections which I had a hard time expressing. I can't wait to share it with family and friends.

STAFF SERGEANT MARCIN BUDNIK,

U.S. Army Ranger

“

There aren't enough words to express the freedom I am experiencing since the retreat. My heart is lighter and my head is held higher. Not an hour goes by that I'm not singing a line or two from the songs we wrote and shared.

MAJOR ARPINEE SARKISIAN,

U.S. Army

Your support will help us:

// Train additional program teams and songwriters, enabling us to hold more retreats and post-retreat offerings for veterans and their families.

// Connect to research and advocacy in order to develop best practices for post-traumatic growth and integration of military experiences to civilian life.

// More actively distribute the music to build connections and awareness around the globe.

With your help, we can be sure veterans are feeling heard, more hopeful and supported.

OUR PROGRAM HAS BEEN FEATURED IN

Los Angeles Times

CBS

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The New York Times

npr

The Washington Post



Please help support our work and donate.

SongwritingWithSoldiers.org

For more information contact:

info@songwritingwithsoldiers.org

Phone: 512-387-5857

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