



# SongwritingWith:Soldiers®

**100th Retreat Milestone**









## 100th Retreat Milestone







*“Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws.”*

– Andrew Fletcher







## Celebrating 100 Retreats

As we reach the remarkable milestone of our 100th retreat, we honor everyone who has shared their stories and taken this extraordinary journey with us. Each retreat has forged bonds – with veterans, active-duty service members, and their families, as well as civilians, creative professionals, facilitators, and SW:S staff – that go beyond barriers and honors the strength of the human spirit. This book allows us to highlight the many moments of creativity and connection that have shaped our work and the transformative power of our program. In the pages that follow, you will discover stories of hope, courage, and change. Every voice matters and every story finds its melody. Thank you for joining us in celebrating this milestone and “The Power of Being Heard!”

*"Having complete strangers asking you to dump your whole heart out onto the floor so that they can help you sift through all of the love and pain while gathering the best parts for a song is life altering... And what magnificently kind and strong hearts they must possess to be willing to hold so much pain in their hands and then show us the beauty of it all."*

*– Adela, Gold Star Retreat Participant*





## Since 2012 We Have Accomplished:

# 100

3-Day Weekend  
Retreats

# 1,375+

Songs  
Written

# 6,000+

Veterans and Their  
Families Served

Connections Made &  
Songs Written in Over

# 20

States

AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, FL, GA, IN, MA, MD, MN,  
MT, NY, PA, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA, and WA.

# 13

Songs  
And  
Stories

Mission driven, and  
professionally recorded  
and released on Spotify  
and other DSPs

# 775+

Collaborative Songwriting  
Sessions Through  
Our Partners

# 190,000

Song Streams

# 80,000

Story Views

Sustaining Partnerships with



BOULDER CREST  
FOUNDATION



EOD WARRIOR  
FOUNDATION



WOUNDED WARRIOR  
PROJECT



SHEEP DOG®  
IMPACT ASSISTANCE



CAMP  
SOUTHERN  
GROUND



northwestpassage  
hope & healing



GratitudeAmerica



Berklee



SOUND  
UNION







# A Journey to Creativity and Connection

After serving many military tours of duty in the Army, Joe Austin's guitar had collected dust for nearly 15 years. That changed when he attended his first SongwritingWith:Soldiers retreat in Tennessee in November of 2023. After experiencing that retreat, Joe rediscovered his deep love of music, became a certified meditation and yoga instructor, and rekindled his passions for journaling, film, and photography. Now a valued member of the SW:S community, Joe returns to our retreats as peer support and shares mindfulness practices, spreading connection and light to everyone he meets.

*"When I walked into the SW:S retreat, I was immediately greeted with smiles and laughter. The atmosphere was filled with warmth and camaraderie, making it the perfect environment for creativity to flourish. On the first night, we came together to write a group song, an experience designed to break the ice and dissolve any lingering mystery. It was a fun, light-hearted song that truly brought us together.*

*The next day, I had the opportunity to work with my songwriter [Stevenson Everett], sharing my story and transforming it into something beautiful that will live on forever as a song. The bonds I formed with my fellow veterans were profound, and their stories and songs changed me in ways I never expected. I found myself giving permission to be creative again, igniting a spark within me that had long been dormant.*

*I am deeply grateful to SW:S for helping me reclaim my artistic soul. It inspired me to want to give back. My journey has been rooted in understanding post-traumatic growth, and I believe strongly in the healing power of creativity. Meditation and yoga have been my anchors, providing me with peace and clarity.*

*I hope to share the tools that have worked for me, encouraging fellow veterans to explore different paths to healing. My wish is for them to find the tools that resonate with their own journeys, just as I did. Thank you, SongwritingWith:Soldiers, for your unwavering support and for creating a space where our stories can be shared and celebrated through music."*



# Seeing The Sunshine

William (Joe) Austin / Gloria Downey / Tim Hill / Jack McMillen / Merci McKinley / Richard Robinson / Paul Strickland  
Anthony Wheeler / Jay Clementi / Erin Enderlin / Stevenson Everett / Maia Sharp

I'm grateful for my children  
Grateful for my family and my freedom

I've escaped death, I'm still standing tall  
Fought off my demons and I'm humbled by it all  
Seeing the sunshine

Makes me feel alive  
Blessed to survive the night  
Everything's gonna be alright

Watching the steam  
Burning off the trees  
The world's coming alive just like me

I'm grateful for my friends  
Seeing the sunshine  
Makes feel alive  
Blessed to survive the night

Everything's gonna be alright  
Hey hey hey oh  
Hey Hey hey oh  
Everything's gonna be alright

Know this, the hurt ain't gonna last  
Just remember this too shall too pass  
And seeing the sunshine  
Makes me feel alive

I'm blessed to survive the night  
Everything's gonna be alright  
Hey hey hey oh Hey hey hey oh  
Everything's gonna be alright













## Finding Harmony After Service

Caryn Finch-Collier joined the military as a young woman, seeking to expand her world, to pay for college, and to forge her own path. Over the course of four decades of military service, she rose through the ranks and found herself increasingly distant from her family. When Caryn finally retired, she returned home to children and grandchildren who had grown up in her absence. As she prepared to share her story at a SongwritingWith:Soldiers' partner retreat with Wounded Warrior Project's Couple's Odyssey, Caryn grappled with how to encapsulate 40 years of experiences into a three-minute song.

Caryn wasn't alone on this journey – her husband, Brad, joined her at the retreat, though he was initially resistant. *"My wife had to drag me by the shirt tails,"* Brad admits. The couple had weathered Caryn's long deployments and the challenges of reintegrating into each other's lives. Over time, they had grown apart, and Caryn was struggling with the effects of her military trauma. Through counseling and ultimately their collaborative songwriting experience, Caryn and Brad reconnected, expressing their devotion and commitment to each other.

Their song, "Meet In The Middle," became an expression of this turning point, as they honored the depth of their relationship, built over the decades. *"It came down to forgiveness and commitment,"* Caryn says. Now, she feels strengthened by the knowledge that *"It's a choice. We've chosen to stay together. We've chosen to show our grandkids that even though difficulty happens, you can still have a strong relationship"* The retreat provided Caryn and Brad the space to share their story, be heard, and find healing in the power of music and community.

# Meet In The Middle

Caryn Finch-Collier / Brad Collier / Pryor Baird

Well for so long she was used to  
Pickin' up and peacin' out sayin'  
Goodbye maybe next time but until then in the meantime  
You shouldn't call me  
'Cause you know me  
The last thing I needed to hear is  
That you're drunk and lonely  
And you need me to come back home

When you went left I went right  
We both slept in empty beds at night  
Wishin' you were there to hold me tight  
But we're still here and baby that's a win  
We're still makin' love without sleepin' in  
Sure feels good to feel the softness of your skin  
Step by step, little by little  
We're gonna meet in the middle

He was at home but long gone  
Partyin' like a damn rockstar all day and night long  
With his drunk friends livin' every single day  
Like it was the weekend  
In the deep end, spending all the money  
That she wouldn't send  
On everything and anything in between.

You went left and I went right  
We both slept in empty beds at night  
Wishin' you were there to hold me tight  
But we're still here and baby that's a win  
We still makin' love without sleepin' in  
Sure feels good to feel the softness of your skin  
Step by step, little by little  
We're gonna meet in the middle

Now I won't say it ain't been rough  
And it's a damn good thing that our love is tough

You went left and I went right  
We both slept in empty beds at night  
Wishin' you were there to hold me tight  
But we're still here and baby that's a win  
We still makin' love without sleepin' in  
Sure feels good to feel the softness of your skin  
Step by step, little by little  
We're gonna meet in the middle













# The Fallujah Brotherhood

Amidst the chaos of war-torn Fallujah in 2004, Rick Loomis, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist, found himself in the company of heroes. Among them was Carlos, a resilient immigrant and American soldier, who faced death head-on and emerged with a silver star and a Purple Heart. Their lives intertwined in battle, forging a bond that would endure.

Years later, serving as our photographer at a Gold Star retreat, Rick crossed paths with the parents of a fallen soldier for whom they penned the SW:S program song, “The Lion of Fallujah.” It reignited a connection that sparked the idea for Rick to recommend Carlos, along with other members of their unit, Ben and Robert, for the fall 2023 retreat in Texas. Little did they know, fate had already stepped in bringing another Fallujah fighter, Tristan, to join them at the retreat. Tristan was in the unit that relieved Carlos’ team after deployment.

Here Carlos, Ben, and Robert came together with Rick and Tristan releasing more of their stories of survival, each carrying the weight of their wartime experiences. Together, they found the courage to move forward, guided by the words of Carlos, *“It’s OK to not be OK. It is time that you stop punishing yourself by robbing your loved ones of the real person that is beneath that hurt. Stop merely existing, stop only surviving, it’s time to start the healing, but most importantly it’s time to allow yourself to live your life to the fullest.”*

Their time in Texas became a sanctuary where they could express themselves and channel their pain through music that resonated with their shared experiences. Through the creative process, they discovered a sense of catharsis, finding comfort in the knowledge that they were not alone in their struggles.

As the retreat came to an end their bond strengthened through shared vulnerability, and will continue to sustain them on life’s journey.



# You're Gonna Know My Name

Carlos Gomez Perez / Terry Radigan

I crossed that border  
At the age of nine  
That was my first mission  
No papers, no flag, no country  
No time to think about what I was missing

Became legal  
At the age of nineteen  
Then I signed my life away  
To be one of the few and the proud  
Yes and to finally have my say

I'd be stronger  
I'd be smarter  
I'd beat you at your own game  
I'd be tougher  
I'd be meaner  
And you were gonna know, yea  
You were gonna know my name

Marched off fallujah  
Sent to die at the age of 21  
But I had other plans  
I was gonna make it home  
To hold my son

So I put my head down  
Crossed the fatal funnel  
Felt those bullets pierce my skin  
They might have taken a piece of me  
But I wasn't gonna let them win

So I got stronger  
I got smarter  
I beat them at their own game  
I got tougher  
I got meaner  
I wasn't gonna be  
Wasn't gonna be just another name

I made it home  
'Bout a hundred years older  
With a silver star two bullets  
And a chip on my shoulder  
Lord, it made it so hard to hold her  
So many things  
Wish I could have told her

Yes I'm stronger  
And I'm smarter  
Oh but I will never be the same  
'Cause I am tougher  
And I'm meaner  
Carlos Gomez Perez  
That's my name













# Lay Your Burdens Down

On the final day of a SongwritingWith:Soldiers retreat in Texas, a group of veterans gathered to create their last song together. After days of reflection and creative collaboration, the group came together to write “At Ease”—a song that could resonate far beyond that room, touching hearts of those who’ve served.

A participant, reflecting on his time there shared, “If this had existed 15 years ago, it would’ve saved me a lot of trouble. It would’ve saved my wife and kids a lot of confusion about what was going on with me.” That day, he came to realize, “I have a story, too.”

When the group was asked how they felt Sunday morning, the response came easily: *At ease*. It wasn’t just a simple answer—it was a moment of shared understanding, a feeling of comfort and release. The words came naturally: *At ease, my friends, at ease. Lay your burden down. Take a breath and rest in a new faith that you found.*

The song quickly grew into something more. It became a call to honor those who didn’t make it home, and those who struggled with the transition back to civilian life. “*Most of us lost friends in combat,*” one shared. “*At the end of the day, they’re just another name. This song is for them.*”

What happened in that room was the essence of what SongwritingWith:Soldiers is all about—the alchemy of turning painful stories into music. Songwriter, Will Kimbrough, reflects, “*When you take a difficult story and turn it into something else, it’s magic.*” The song didn’t diminish the pain, but instead honored it, creating something that could be shared with others who truly understood.

Veteran Rhonda Chavez shared that she hopes the song will send a powerful message: “*I hope whoever listens to it knows they’re not alone. If they take the time to listen to every verse, they’ll realize it’s speaking to them.*”

In the end, *At Ease* stands as a testament to the power of connection and the healing that comes from sharing stories. It’s a reminder that, in the presence of others who understand, we can lay down our burdens and leave *at ease*, knowing we no longer carry the weight alone.



# At Ease

Chaddrick Allen / Rhonda Chavez / Sally Griffiths / Justin Lilley / Benjamin Liotta / Carlos Gomez Perez  
Robert Heather Shumate / Tristan Wimmer / James House / Will Kimbrough / Mark Nesler / Terry Radigan

At ease, my friends, at ease  
Lay your burden down  
Take a breath and rest  
In the new faith that you've found  
We came in as strangers  
We're gathered here as friends  
Opened up and shared our hearts  
Family to the end

Where stories are remembered  
You can let it go  
You'll never be forgotten  
Now that they've been told

At ease, my friends, at ease  
Lay your burden down  
Take a breath and rest  
In the new faith that you've found  
We came in as strangers  
We're gathered here as friends  
Opened up and shared our hearts  
Family to the end

Instead of just surviving  
Letting days go by  
This is my revival  
Time to live my life

At ease, my friends, at ease  
Lay your burden down  
Take a breath and rest  
In the new faith that you've found  
We came in as strangers  
We're gathered here as friends  
Opened up and shared our hearts  
Family to the end

Learn to live with peace  
Take it down the road  
You can sing your song  
Everywhere you go

At ease, my friends, at ease  
Lay your burden down  
Take a breath and rest  
In the new faith that you've found  
We came in as strangers  
We're gathered here as friends  
Opened up and shared our hearts  
Family to the end  
Opened up and shared our hearts  
Family to the end













# From Battle Scars To Building Bridges

By Shannon J. Dobbs  
Army Specialist

The darkest moment sometimes comes right before dawn. In 2021, I found myself in Red River, New Mexico, battling demons that no amount of conventional tactics could defeat. Years of unresolved trauma had left me questioning everything, especially my place in the world of social impact where I'd once felt called to serve.

Then I heard about SongwritingWith:Soldiers.

Working with Nashville songwriters to tell my story didn't just help me process trauma – it helped me rediscover my mission. Through the process of turning pain into poetry, I realized something crucial: The skills we learned in service – logistics, coalition building, rapid problem solving – these aren't just war tools. They're exactly what communities need to tackle today's battles against climate change, food insecurity, and social isolation.

Today, I'm building something that would have seemed impossible during those dark days: A nationwide network of community-owned food hubs that connect rural farmers with urban markets, turn food waste into resources, and create economic opportunities for veterans and civilians alike.

If you're feeling lost, know this: Your skills, your experience, your ability to adapt and overcome – communities desperately need these right now. The mission isn't over; it's just transformed.

The path from trauma to purpose isn't straight or easy. But just as SongwritingWith:Soldiers helped me find my voice again, I hope sharing this journey helps others find their next mission.

Remember: The skills that got us through our darkest days are exactly what our communities need right now. We didn't come this far to stand on the sidelines while our communities face unprecedented challenges.

Ready to serve again, differently this time? Let's build something meaningful together.



# Where I'm Heading

Shannon Dobbs / Radney Foster

I gotta Dagwood sandwich worth of PTSD  
And all my troubles keep following me  
It all started when I called the cops at eleven  
I ain't gonna fly away to get where I'm heading  
Mama just said I'll see you soon  
Bought a one-way ticket down to military school

It's a great big story  
But I'm writing new chapters  
I keep getting knocked down  
But I'm learning from the laughter  
You know it's my choice to stay  
So, I ain't gonna run away  
No, I ain't gonna fly away to get where I'm heading

Trying to make a difference, trying to sing my song  
But there's a hundred-forty-seven ways to get this wrong  
Corruption rots the ground right out from underneath your feet  
They took everything they could and it all tumbled down on me  
I gotta find a new way to get where I want to be

It's a great big story  
But I'm writing new chapters  
I keep getting knocked down  
But I'm learning from the laughter  
You know it's my choice to stay  
So, I ain't gonna run away  
No, I ain't gonna fly away to get where I'm heading

I'm coming up with a brand new plan  
Reaching out with my heart and hands  
To bring us all together to feed our families.

It's a great big story  
But I'm writing new chapters  
I keep getting knocked down  
But I'm learning from the laughter  
You know it's my choice to stay  
So, I ain't gonna run away  
No, I ain't gonna fly away to get where I'm heading













# When Song Becomes A Mission

At a SongwritingWith:Soldiers retreat in Texas, Marine veteran Tristan Wimmer found the words he hadn't been able to say while his brother was still alive—words of love, regret, and a promise to live up to the man his brother Kiernan saw in him. “*Hey Brother*,” written with songwriter Mark Nesler, honors Kiernan, also a Marine, who sustained a traumatic brain injury in service and later died by suicide.

Since then, Tristan has carried that promise forward by co-founding 22 Jumps, a nonprofit dedicated to honoring his brother's legacy and preventing veteran suicide. He shares

“I co-founded 22 Jumps in 2020 after my brother's suicide. He was the one who first got me into parachute sports, and when he died, I inherited his gear. Jumping became a way for me to process everything and figure out my next steps. What started as a small, bootstrapped idea with a few friends—22 jumps off a mountain in Phoenix—quickly grew into something bigger than I ever imagined. We raised more money than we thought possible, so we did it again the next year, and it kept expanding. It's been incredible to see this grow and to know that, in my brother's honor, we're creating opportunities for healing and hope.”

Tristan's story reminds us that the songs written at our retreats aren't endings—they're beginnings. Seeds planted in the hearts of veterans who go on to create change in ways we could never predict. Writing “*Hey Brother*” didn't just help Tristan process grief—it gave him permission to honor his brother out loud and, in doing so, opened a path forward. Today, 22 Jumps embodies the same values we hold at SW:S: connection, shared experience, and the belief that the load lightens when we stop carrying our story alone.



# Hey Brother

Tristan Wimmer / Mark Nesler

I was blessed to have a brother  
I realize that now  
I sure wish I'd known that when you were still around  
You've been gone eight long years  
And man it's still hard  
Maybe that's why you're hanging 'round  
Like some distant star  
Hey brother  
There's some things I need to say  
Words I kept bottled up  
Till you blew yourself away  
Like I love you, I miss you  
I'm sorry that I chose  
Afghanistan over you when you needed me the most  
Hey brother

I didn't know how much  
You looked up to me  
I'm just now hearing that from all your friends I meet  
You were so goddamn funny  
So many good times looking back  
No doubt I'd give anything just to hear you laugh  
Hey brother

There's some things I need to say  
Words I kept bottled up  
Till you blew yourself away  
Like I love you, I miss you  
You didn't die in vain  
And even though it's not my fault I still take all the blame  
Hey brother

Thank you for the parachutes  
And clothes you left for me  
Guess it should come as no surprise that they fit me perfectly  
I'll become The man you saw in me  
If it's the last thing that I do  
And I promise to be a better dad than the brother I was to you













# We're Glad You're Here

By Kevin Reeder, PhD, Marine veteran  
Facilitator and Special Advisor for SW:S

It took me a while to figure out why I enlisted in the Marine Corps with a perfectly good college education. Over time I started finding opportunities to use and process my military experience. I was presented with the opportunity to attend a SongwritingWith:Soldiers retreat in 2015. When we arrived at the retreat site in upstate New York that October, I got out of the car and promptly slammed the car door on my thumb.

Ouch.

The pain was quickly forgotten and replaced with another powerful feeling, that of “these people are glad that I am here.”

Since that time I’ve been to many retreats, first as peer support and then as a SongwritingWith:Soldiers facilitator and that feeling is something that I have tried to recreate whenever I facilitate a SW:S retreat. My retreat weekend was unlike anything else I had ever experienced in such a short timeframe. I had meaningful connections with people I had met only hours earlier. I was able to see myself and my past through a lens of personal strengths. I was so engaged with the process that I totally forgot about my black and blue thumb until I woke up Monday morning and flew home to Arkansas.

Since that retreat I have benefited greatly from strengths spotting in myself and others and in recognizing the power of micro-moments of connection. I have a greater appreciation for beauty and excellence; more specifically, I listen to music more deeply with appreciation for narrative and the power of a well-told story.

Another takeaway from the weekend is to be careful shutting car doors.



# The Better Of Me

Kevin Reeder / Mary Gauthier

There's a stranger inside me  
He don't have a name  
He does things that scare me  
And I'm the one I blame  
He's backed into a corner, that's where he'll always be  
Sometimes the worst gets the better of me

I believe in constant motion  
Like a bullet from a gun  
It don't matter where I'm going  
Leaving gets it done  
I just end up where I started, every night in my dreams  
Sometimes the worst gets the better of me

When I got back from the war  
I paid a hundred fifty bucks  
I wanted the documents, yes, I tried to look you up  
They sent me a letter, the one I knew I would receive  
Sometimes the worst gets the better of me  
But it's only sometimes the worst gets the better of me













# The Man You Used To Know

Bruce and Lesley came to a SongwritingWith:Soldiers retreat carrying years of unspoken hurt. After multiple deployments, Bruce returned home a changed man, and Lesley struggled to recognize the person she had married. Unsure what to expect, they stepped into the retreat together—and what began as uncertainty grew into a breakthrough they hadn't imagined, and a song “The Man I Used To Know” written with songwriter Trent Willmon. Here's what they shared about the experience:

*“At first I thought, I can't sing, I don't write music—what am I doing here?” Bruce says. “But once you start sharing your story and listening to others, you realize you're not alone.”*

Lesley adds, *“After a couple of deployments, I finally told him, ‘I don't know who you are anymore. You're not the guy I married.’”*

Together, they found a way forward. *“There was a lot inside me I needed to let out,”* Bruce explains. *“Once I did, I realized it wasn't sad—it was freeing.”*

*“It gave us language for things we hadn't known how to say,”* Lesley says. *“It reminded me of the man I married, and showed me healing is possible.”*

Now, they hope their story helps others. Bruce shares, *“I want someone who's in a bad place to feel like things will get better.”*

Lesley adds, *“If we can touch one heart, start one healing—we've done our job. We got married one time, and we're going to fight for our love.”*

*“They are the folks that keep us free. So it's a wonderful opportunity for somebody like me who didn't serve, to give back and try to honor and better understand the experiences of that community.”*

– Trent Willmon, SW:S Songwriter



# The Man You Used To Know

Lesley and Bruce Anderson / Trent Willmon

Sometimes I'm still over there the smell of war is in the air  
Even though I'm back home here with you  
I do my best to be a dad a husband and a normal man  
Just tryin' to blend in like I'm supposed to

But I'm reliving this nightmare  
Why am I still stuck out there  
How do I just shut out that life and let it go  
I don't know how not to be a soldier  
Without feeling or emotion  
How do I get to be that man again  
You used to know  
The man you used to know

I know life will never be same  
The perfect in the picture frame  
Because I've seen too many things to just pretend  
That I don't like this stranger I've become  
That I don't feel worthy of your love  
That I'm just a shell of who I was back then  
When I was your best friend

But I'm reliving this nightmare  
Why am I still stuck out there  
How do I just shut out that life and let it go  
I don't know how not to be a soldier  
Without feeling or emotion  
How do I get to be that man again  
You used to know  
You used to know

You always been my battle buddy  
Had my six thru thick and thin  
How do we put these broken pieces back together again  
How do I heal again  
How do I feel again

Because I'm tired of reliving this nightmare  
Tired of being stuck there  
How do I just shut out that life and let it go  
I don't know how not to be a soldier  
Without feelings or emotion  
How do I get to be the man again  
I'm just tryin' to find that man again  
You used to know  
The man you used to know













## It's About The Song

The power of a song is something our songwriters and program team witness at every retreat, and it's a magic that never ceases to amaze. When veterans transform their stories into songs, we see a profound journey unfold—from silence to voice, from isolation to connection. These songs become bridges of understanding and acts of continued service, as past participant AnnMarie Halterman, Veteran, U.S. Air Force Captain, beautifully reflects:

*“It is about the song... once that song is created it can be shared with others...when you have a professional that has tools to write a good song it's something that you get to be proud of...and listening to the other [veteran's] songs, every song was phenomenal...I was blown away!*

*Everyone who shared their stories and worked with the songwriter gave something of themselves...and what that contribution is, is service. It's weird because the service was being provided for us as veterans...but then our stories can have value beyond us and as a person that volunteered for the military, that's all I want is to serve, and so that gave me purpose and a community.”*

There has been an outpouring of comments and reactions to these songs. We are expanding the reach of these powerful stories, ensuring they connect to more people who need to hear them. Here is one of many responses from our YouTube community:

*“To every soldier, active or retired—you are in my prayers. You have my unwavering support and admiration. Please know that your story matters, your struggle is seen, and your presence is appreciated beyond words. Thank you for putting this truth into song. You may never fully know the healing it could bring someone walking a similar path. This song is a gift. “*

On behalf of our participants, staff, songwriters and board. Thank you for being a part of our SW:S family. Together, we're not just creating songs—we are sharing the power of being heard!



# The Power Of Being Heard

*“At the end of our first retreat, one of the veterans said, ‘this retreat restored my faith in humanity.’ Now, looking at us celebrating our 100th retreat, there's no doubt the impact that this program has had on humanity. And for all the hard work of everyone involved and every veteran and family member who showed up, Here's to you. And here's to what's possible when we all work together to help lift people and change lives.”*

– Mary Judd, SongwritingWith:Soldiers Co-Founder

Through our new music program we are now amplifying these voices even further, sharing the powerful songs written in our retreats with broader audiences and creating new pathways for connection and healing through music.

These professionally recorded releases are mission-driven. Each song serves a dual purpose: connecting veterans who share similar experiences while civilian audiences gain a deeper appreciation about military life and sacrifice. Release of these songs through familiar streaming platforms ensures these authentic stories reach everyone who needs to hear them and to amplify the voices of those who serve.

For veterans and their families to be understood, they need to be heard. This starts with providing a carefully crafted experience so they can connect to themselves and others, and where songwriters can help shape their story into song. Once the song is created, we provide ways for it to be heard beyond the writing session by veterans and non-veterans alike.

2025 marks an important milestone as we completed our 100th retreat, celebrated in October with our long-standing partner the Boulder Crest Foundation. We are all in this together WITH our participants, partners, donors and board of directors who all contribute to making this journey possible.

The need for our program remains great but we know that one by one, song by song, we are making a real difference in people's lives. Thank you for helping us harness “The Power of Being Heard”.











## In Gratitude

We are grateful for each donation that has been made to support our organization and the well-being of our veterans and their families. We would like to recognize the following gifts received January 1, 2024–December 31, 2024 and to extend our thanks to our donors and everyone who has helped us on this incredible journey.

### **\$500,000**

Johnson Family Fund

### **\$100,000**

Danette and Randy Smith

### **\$50,000 to \$99,999**

Anonymous • Judith Aranow • Common Sense Fund • Wounded Warrior Project Foundation

### **\$25,000 to \$49,999**

Anonymous • Anonymous • Creative Forces • Lieber-Evans Family Charitable Fund • Curb Records

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# Special Thanks

*“The empathy and compassion demonstrated by the staff can not be expressed in words. It was a time of healing and connection that I have not experienced before, I am so grateful for this experience.”*

– Program Participant, October 2023

We would like to extend a very special thank you to each of you who help make it possible.

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