

Human Adjacent

By Liam Flynn

“Naked I saw thee,

O beauty of beauty!

And I blinded my eyes

For fear I should flinch.” (Pearse)

Swearing can be an art form. Growing up, and hearing my Irish grandfather swear was so fluid in his speech that it was more poetry than offensive. There was no pronounced pause before or after the curses. It just flowed, like a springtime mountain brook. 35 years as a Philadelphia detective gave him time to develop that rhythmic timing. Sitting around a kitchen table or helping around a construction project with him was when I was introduced to swearing and cursing. My dad, who was a sailor for 12 years, never cursed. Every word was chosen with care and meaning. Yes, he had times that a nun would have been felt justified to blaspheme, but he held it in around my brother, mom and myself. What he would say is “Remember what John Carter, Warlord of Mars said, ‘WHERE THERE IS LIFE, THERE IS HOPE!’” Where there is Life, there is Hope. Later when I started meeting other veterans, I would hear their speech and wonder at why my dad didn’t talk like them. All he would say is that he didn’t want to bring that language home.

My own adventure into the enlisted ranks happened when I went to Marine Boot Camp as a 26-year-old college graduate. And what a journey. In my first two years I graduated boot, graduated infantry school, graduated Basic Reconnaissance School, conducted over 1,500 hours of field reconnaissance, gained my coxswain license, fired over 200,000 rounds of 5.56 through my M4 rifle, 50,000 rounds of .45 from my 1911, deployed to two different continents and 6 different countries. Another thing that happened was I only spent 25 days with my wife over those 2 years. And I learned “Grunt Grunt.” Fluently.

“I heard thy music,
O sweetness of sweetness!
And I shut my ears
For fear I should fail.” (Pearse)

“Grunt Grunt” is a language that was spoken within the military. While a general civilian perspective that the military’s language is all acronyms, “Grunt Grunt” is the informal slang language used by the lower-level enlisted members. A “Grunt” is a typical infantry member who is only really expected to carry heavy things and kill the enemy. To put it in a perspective, “Military” would be like the “Queen’s English” and “Grunt Grunt” would be mumble rap. While the speakers of “Grunt Grunt” can understand standard “Military,” the reverse couldn’t always be said. The main difference is the vulgarity. While it might be expected that all members of the military curse and use swear words, the language of the most junior enlisted ranks takes it to socially unacceptable levels. This is an example of what a corporal (generally the high ranking of the lower enlisted levels) would say to their group of privates, private-first classes, and lance corporals. Anywhere between 5-20 individuals. Some notes to keep in mind; this is spoken by any gender or race, to any gender or race, with no care or concern for identifiers

and (supposedly) not meant in any derogatory ways beyond annoyance that everyone has the mental capacity of a jar of mayonnaise.

“Check it out JEWS. SHUT YOUR FUCKIN CUM CATCHERS AND TAKE YOUR DAMN DICK SKINNERS OUTTA YOUR FUCKING POCKETS. Gunny in his infinite fucking wisdom wants you faggot failures to get these fucking hummers to 52 area HLZ NLT 0600. I don’t give a fuckin shit it’s balls thirty and 32. Vic commanders, check you got full J-cans and your donkey dicks. Conduct your fucking PCCs 30 mins prior to DFL. For fucks sake, shit and shave before the fagot fucking 1st Sgt gets here.”¹

“I kissed thy lips

O sweetness of sweetness!

And I hardened my heart

For fear of my ruin.” (Pearse)

This “language” is based on the idea that a person’s ego, their feelings and thought, what made them unique, doesn’t matter. It’s dehumanizing, and it needs to be. If I was treated like a beautiful flower, how could I be expected to run 25 kilometers through the desert night with 140 pounds on my back in under 2 hours? How could I convince a group of meat-eating knuckle

¹JEWS: Junior Enlisted Warrior. A slur for the lower 3 ranks in the Marine Corps. Cum catcher: mouth. Dick skimmers: hands. Gunny: Gunnery Sergeant, an E-7 in the United States Marine Corps. Infinite fucking wisdom: “I do not agree with this, but this is what we have to do.” Faggot failures: A slur to imply that a person isn’t even good enough to be disowned. Hummers: The HMMWV (High Mobility Multipurpose Vehicle). HLZ : Helicopter Landing Zone. A large, cleared area that can accommodate a helicopter. NLT: No Later Than. A notation that means “the absolute latest point in time” for something to occur. 0600: 6 A.M. Balls thirty: 12:30 A.M. On a 24-hour clock it is denoted as 0030. The “00” is interpreted as a scrotum. 32: 32 degrees F. Vic commander: Person in charge of the vehicle, and personnel and equipment on it. J-can: Jerry Can. A 5-gallon refillable fuel canister. Donkey dick: Any black cylinder object. In this case, it refers to an attachable funnel for the fuel canister. PCCs: Pre-Combat Checks. This is a list of things to inspect before leaving friendly lines. DFL: Departure of Friendly Lines. When a unit leaves a safe and secure area. Shit and shave: Shave away facial hair and make sure you are not out of any uniform regulations. 1st Sgt: First Sergeant, an E-8 in the USMC. They can be viewed as the “Human Resources” of the Corps and tend to focus on regulations over the conduct of a mission.

dragers that we aren't going to be sleeping for the next 4 days? Remove their humanity, remove their ego, and the unimaginable can be accomplished. "Grunt Grunt" doesn't care about your or anyone's feelings. It's a computing language, but for humans. Each branch of the military has their own dialect, but each accomplishes the same end result. You are here to do a job. This job is hard and virtually impossible. The only thing that you can afford to focus on is this job. Set your ego and personality aside and turn to.

"I blinded my eyes

And my ears I shut,

I hardened my heart

And my love I quenched." (Pearse)

So when I was finally able to live with my wife again after this deep dive into the subculture of and enlisted Marine, life was great. I could relax, away from work. Maybe complain and grip about leadership and subordinates. Share my life again with the person I loved. Gradually at first, then more and more as time passed, my life partner, the one person who sees me for all my faults and accomplishments, the person I love the most started to use the same language that I'd share with my other cogs in the machine, it had to be stopped.

Our language is a mix of all our interests. Sometimes we make references to Dungeons and Dragons lingo. Sometimes it's slight military language. Other times it's influenced by which ever novel or anime series we are consuming at the time. The underlying connection with all of them is our nonverbal language. She knows that when I hug her just a little tighter that I'm close to an anxiety or panic attack. I know that when her fingers open and close in a rapid pattern, she is stressed. We know the faces we make when we make a joke or are hiding a surprise. Our comfortable silence or that electric buzz in the air is our language. It's extremely personal. My

humorous sarcasm comes through with a rise of a single eyebrow. Her joyful wickedness is told to me by the half-curved smile. Most importantly, is that none of these cues are telegraphed. We aren't on a stage. We have just been together long enough that a lot of our conversation is felt and seen, not just heard.

“I turned my back
On the dream I had shaped,
And to this road before me
My face I turned.” (Pearse)

I saw why my dad didn't want that language in the house I grew up in. Home was where I could be a person. My loved ones weren't on a mission. The only “mission” I had was to help and support Sarah. If I got a laugh, I was doing ok. My transition back to civilian life, back to the real world, was made all the easier because at home I was treated as a human. Years of training and work and countless ego deaths that I went through left me feeling a honed tool. The right tool for any job. When I saw that I was breaking. That I was deteriorating. The constant pounding and hammering and stress had finally worn and cracked the tool I had become. It was hard finding myself again. Without the language Sarah and I had, instead of the family heirloom over the mantle that I've become, I would have ended up in the landfill.

“I set my face
To the road here before me,
To the work that I see,
To the death that I shall meet.” (Pearse)

Where there is life, there is hope!" My dad always told me this whenever I was struggling or when an obstacle seemed to be too great to overcome. As he would explain it, that as long life is there, there is always possibility. The one thing that will remove hope, is death. Years and years I heard this. Sometimes taking it to heart, sometimes dismissing it because it's not what I needed to hear at the moment. It wasn't until as an adult, I decided to read the John Carter series. Nowhere in any of the any of the novels was the quote "Where there is life, there is hope." John Carter never said it. I had mentioned it to my dad as a "oh by the way" but he insisted that Carter indeed said it. To him, the source didn't matter, or that he truly believed it was from him. Either way, he wanted to help me. In my younger years, it had never really resonated with me. It wasn't until he had said it in a more somber tone. After I had told him about the 6 Recon Marines who had committed suicide within the first 4 months of that year. It wasn't until we shared our fights with depression, about him telling me about the shotgun that sat in his closet, about me hearing that calm sweet voice say, "it's ok, just jump." We all have had things taken from us. Bits that we either lost or tore away from ourselves. Dreams that we had shaped. But. In the words of the great John Carter, Warlord of Mars, "WHERE THERE IS LIFE, THERE IS HOPE!"

Works Cited

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