

Liliana Ruiz: Note-taker, occasional commentator.

Shahlaa Raja: Interviewer

Marcus Liufau-Wright: Student Veteran, interviewee

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MiraCosta College Student Veteran Oral History Service Learning Project

Shahlaa Raja (S.R): Today is November 7th, 2017, and we are at the MiraCosta library with Marcus Liufau-Wright. He was born on August 4th, 1992. We are interviewing him; Our names are Lilly Ruiz and Shahlaa Raja. We are participating in the MiraCosta College Service Learning Project. Marcus Liufau-Wright was a part of the United States Marine Corp and his rank was Corporal E4. So, we're going to go back into the past and kind of go from the beginning and in a sort of chronological order. So, tell me about yourself: Where were you born and where did you grow up?

Marcus Liufau-Wright (M.L.W): I was born and raised in the beautiful islands of Hawaii. I'm from the state capital Honolulu. So, yeah.

S.R: What kinds of things did you enjoy during your youth in Hawaii?

M.L.W: I just enjoyed, like-- I was one of those kids that never liked staying inside the house, but I enjoyed playing games. I loved playing games, like video games, and I always played outside with my friends. In high school, I picked up writing poetry, and just from then, spoken word became a favorite thing of mine to do.

S.R: Oh, nice! So, kind of like when you were younger, did you have anybody in your life that was special to you that were enlisted into any type of military?

M.L.W: Oh! My grandpa. He was in the army for two years and he was very proud of his service and when I decided to join, that was one of the first people that supported it to the max. He was just all for it and stuff like that, so yes.

S.R: So, you enlisted on your own choice?

M.L.W: I enlisted because, to be honest-- A funny story was, I enlisted in the Marine Corp by accident almost in a way because I was supposed to meet an Air Force recruiter and I walked into a Marine Corp recruiting office on accident. And I was like, "Man, what's all this red and yellow?" because the Air Force has blue! And then I got scooped up for the Marine corps recruiter and then I sat down with them and one of the guys, he was born and raised in Hawaii too, the guy that ran the office-- and the distinct words, verbatim that he said that got me like 'I'm sold,' he told me this: "You see all these other branches of service next to us? They're all guppies; We're sharks here in the Marine Corp. What do you want to be? A guppy or a shark? And I was like, "I'm a freaking shark!" So, that's basically made me want to join the Marine Corp and it was largely due to my wife too. Cause we was having a kid and I was working two jobs and that wasn't paying as much--

I was living with in-laws, so it was largely due to my wife. My wife was the big push for me to join the Marine Corp.

S.R: So, at what age did you enlist into the Marine Corp?

M.L.W: I was nineteen years old.

S.R: You were nineteen years old?

M.L.W: Yes.

S.R: And did you kind of feel a little anxious about joining the Marine Corp? Or did you feel excited?

M.L.W: I was excited, you know, because I was something-- I never considered joining the military. Like, literally not 'til that year that I actually went into the recruiting office did I ever think about joining. And my mom was against me joining the Marine corp. She wanted me to join the Air Force actually, the Air Force or the Navy, because there's this stigma behind marines dying-- That they're always the first to go into combat, which is true, but after joining, it just never became-- I just never really seen combat as much as people think. You know?

S.R: So, you know how you're joining the Marine Corp, I heard that there is a test called the ASVAB. How did you feel about taking the ASVAB? Were you maybe anxious about it? Did you feel confident about taking the test?

M.L.W: It was me and my best friend Dexter, we took like a practice ASVAB because there was a Marine corps recruiter who came to our school and he gave us a practice ASVAB and then from that like me and him scored one of the highest out of the group of friends that we were with. And from then on, it was pretty easy, like standard questions that high school actually teaches you. Like, if you just go through basic high school education, like the ASVAB is not that bad. And I had friends who just failed the ASVAB, like horrible. I'm like, "I have the same high-school degree as you; How do you fail the ASVAB?" I was like-- I thought it was easy for the most part, so you know.

S.R: So, at the time of enlisting, where were you located?

M.L.W: I was in Hawaii, so it was a place-- the city was called Pearl City, Pearl Ridge. That was the recruiting office, or the recruiting sub-station, the RSS for short, that's where I came out of.

S.R: And so, did you have any sort of specialty or training before you joined the military, or was this all kind of a fresh thing for you?

M.L.W: It was all fresh; Like in the marine corps, they have a pulley program, which is basically like a prerequisite before they ship you out to boot camp. There's a series of exercises that you have to pass before they think about sending you to boot camp. Like you have to at least do 3 pull ups like minimum, run a mile and a half under 13 minutes and just do at least 65-75 crunches. And that's just the prerequisites.

S.R: Oh, okay. So, do you recall your first days in the military?

M.L.W: Yes, I would say in boot camp. In boot camp, it was-- for me, boot camp wasn't fun at all. To a lot of friends, I came to know in my career, they thought it was fun. But for myself, I would not go through it again even if they paid me. Yeah, it was something I wasn't used to going through boot camp. We have like no phones, nothing, nothing like that. Pretty much to communicate with our family back home, it's like all through letters. You are told when to sleep, how to sleep pretty much, or it's just like straight rules that you have to follow. Like they tell you when to eat, how to eat sometimes, so yeah.

S.R: So, you missed your family a lot?

M.L.W: Yeah, that was probably one of the first times I actually spend time away from family, you know by myself. So, that was a huge factor into playing why I thought why boot camp sucked.

S.R: So, kind of more about boot camp, how was the food?

M.L.W: The food wasn't that bad. It was nutritional food. Because like, in boot camp especially in the Marine Corp, the Marine Corps is the most demanding branch out of all the branches. It is the most toughest [sic] boot camp in America as far as military goes, and they feed you well because you go through the demands- the physical demands that they put you through. Boot Camp is like you have to eat well for your body to actually keep up with those demands. So, they feed you well.

S.R; So, did you ever miss like home cooking? Because they probably didn't serve Hawaiian type food there at all!

M.L.W: No, most definitely not! Like, Hawaiian barbecue is most definitely one of my favorite foods and Hawaii is very Asian oriented, and so coming here-- like here's a lot of rice in Hawaii, you eat a lot of rice, and so coming here eating like mashed potatoes-- it's wasn't my cup of tea, so I got used to that type of thing.

S.R: So, you feel like you kind of got used to eating military food? Was it at all delicious?

M.L.W: It was good, it was like well-cooked meals It wasn't anything bad. I thought it was good.

S.R: And you know how you were talking about how they tell you to sleep. Where there any other restricting rules that really bothered you about boot camp?

M.L.W: I would say, well, there's like a timeline that everything has to get done and they're really strict on it. Like you have to be up by like 4:30 in the morning, 5 o'clock in the morning--and like you have to everybody line up in a certain way to have accountability, to make sure everybody is where they are. Um, eating a certain time, and also, I'd say the most open-- pretty much we have no bathroom stalls basically; there's no doors in the bathrooms. So, like, when you go to take a crap or something, and like you basically just-- everybody just sees each other you know? And it's all open like, "Hey, just pass the toilet paper," you know?

L.R: Ah, I want to make a comment.

M.L.W: Sure!

L.R: I relate to that, not being like in the military, but I got locked up a long time ago and I remember that! I remember that! Even being in the girls' place, like it's so bad! There's

no stalls, nothing! The showers, there's like one, two--and they're all-- and they're not even covered! You don't get any privacy, you have to like-- you know? So, I can understand that it's so uncomfortable and so bad.

M.L.W: At first, it's uncomfortable, but people get used to it. I know for guys, we all got used to seeing each other and stuff like that. It was just like whatever.

S.R: So, do you remember exactly a typical day at boot camp? Like, how did you spend those days? Where there certain tasks or things that you had to do during your day that would have to be done?

M.L.W: Yeah, there was literally-- it was pretty much like a thirteen-week thing, boot camp in the marine corps and like they had it laid out--like on this day, we called days T45 or T20, you know what I mean? Those were training days, and we called it whatever training day it was. And so each day would be laid out pretty much -- and we would know, like "Hey tomorrow we're going to be here, and this, this, that," They would break it down-- they would always let us know, a day or week ahead like, "Hey this is going to happen, we're going to be here, here, and here," Because like, in boot camp there's like-- I don't know at the top of my head, but there's at least 10 other companies, 10 other companies, which is like 10 other groups of recruits, that's what we're called in boot camp. So, there's a thousand people, over a thousand people that go through boot camp. And everybody is on this time schedule, we all share the same time schedule. And if a company is not where they are, it kind of messes up with the other companies' time schedule because everybody is on this strict regimen that they have to follow. Like the most important days were like the battalion-commander inspection, where our captain or whoever ran our company would inspect our informs and our uniforms had to be like crisp; There couldn't like any strings or a piece of string hanging out-- that was like not allowed. And so, those were like the important days. And then there was also drill, drill was big thing in boot camp. So, yup.

S.R: So, you were saying that you really didn't like boot camp, but did you at least kind of make some bonds during the boot camp? Did you make some friends? Do you still talk to those friends?

M.L.W: Bootcamp friends? I'm friends with them on Facebook, and I see them on Facebook and stuff like that but as far as that-- But no, not much. I seen [sic]-- I mean in my career, I seen a couple of them, but then we never really like talk. Like, I bonded with them at the time being, but then throughout my whole career-- we never hit each other up. There's probably one that I saw, we was [sic] like neighbors and we lived by each other.

S.R: And so, kind of relating to that, did you know any instructors or did you remember any specific instructor that made an impact on you?

M.L.W; Almost every Marine, at least 95% of Marines that I know, remember all of their drill instructors. Like ALL of them. Like their names are almost embedded in your mind because you like spend every day-- it's 13 weeks-- they stress you out, they push you--

there's three phases in boot camp: The first phase is-- usually what they do, they break you down, like they take you out of that civilian mentality, and they kind of like, "Hey, you're in the Marine Corps now, you're going to abide by these rules," you know? So, they break you down, get you into this mentality like hey we're all in this together type thing.

M.L.W: And the second phase, they kind of like groom you in a way, try to almost like build you up, and the third phase, is when they actually mold you, so you become a Marine. But, my drill instructor's names: Sassarn Rivas, was my senior drill instructor, Sassarn Griffith, was my J-hat, who was the second in command, my third hat was Sergeant Ruby and he was the only drill instructor that got my name right the first time and said it right! And then it was Sassarn Anazola, Anazola was a training hat that, he was a- we call them hats because drill instructors wear this distinct hat that are called smokies. You know like smoky the bear hat, you know what sheriffs wear, campaign hats. Sassarn Anazola was the - we were his first year of trainee recruits so, I hated him the most. If there is anything I will always remember him because he would always get on my case.

S.R: So, during boot camp did you have any specific, what did you train for specifically, you know? Did you have any specialties that you trained for in boot camp?

M.L.W: Boot camp was like basics, they teach you the Marine Corp history. We know these things called ditties and acronyms we use to-- It's almost embedded into every Marine; Like the fourteen leadership traits, we always knew it by acronym called JJDIDTIEBUCKLE. And those fourteen traits are what makes a leader in the marine corp. So, that was the acronym that we had to know, and there's always like BABSIS. There's basic things like also, like I said drill, if there is anything I took away from boot camp, drill was like my favorite thing. Like it was the most fun I ever had in boot camp. Drill was my favorite thing; I just thought that I was so badass at it. And also, in boot camp it's where you actually, I think, where the only branch the qualifies so in order to pass boot-camp you have to qualify to shoot a rifle. So, they teach you how to shoot in boot-camp and they have this scale from like expert, sharp-shooter, and marksman; it's how the rate you on how they shoot. The first time I shot a rifle I qualified as expert, so, it was awesome!

S.R: So, kind of moving past the boot camp, did you serve in any wars?

M.L.W: I was in the Afghanistan war, the O.E.F, we called it. Operation Endurance Freedom.

That was the Afghanistan war that America went into. I was afforded the opportunity to go to Afghanistan, and it was pretty cool, yeah.

S.R: So, was that the first time you had traveled outside the U.S?

M.L.W: Yes, yes it was. It was a great experience.

S.R: Do you culturally it was so different than America?

M.L.W: I would say in a way, yeah. It was because before we got to Afghanistan, we landed in Germany and spent there for a few hours. And then we arrived. And like Afghanistan's hot. Like as soon as you step off the C 130, which is the aircraft the military travels on

usually, it was like a microwave. It was like I stepped into a microwave; It was like 120 degrees where we landed. So, it was extremely hot. But the culture everybody walks around with loaded weapons. So, as soon as you land there, they give you all this briefing and you're given ammo. Everyone is given ammo to their weapons. So, everyone on base walks around with loaded weapons basically.

S.R: And did that make you feel a little bit nervous?

M.L.W: At first, yes, because it was my first time actually carrying around a loaded weapon. Like, besides, we shoot at the range and that was my first time shooting actual rounds. But, that was just paper targets on a range with people you know. But in Afghanistan, we are not the only military branch there. There's America there, but I seen [sic] British army there and I seen [sic] the army from like Georgia there, the Georgians, soldiers from Jordan. It was just like a whole, like a collective-- pretty much like an allied forces [sic] pretty much on this one base. We just pretty much blended all together.

S.R: So, what was your job? Or your assignment that you were assigned there?

M.L.W: Well, so, in the military my MOS, my military occupational specialty was- I was a cook. So, being a cook in the Marine Corps--like one thing about cooks at the time when I arrived, we weren't actually needed. I mean, we were just needed for at the end of the operation. But when we first landed, we just basically did like security work-force stuff. So, we would just guard the dining facilities, and we would check ID's to make sure that-- cause in order to get in the dining facility, everybody had to have an ID on them. So, we just basically-- security guards basically.

S.R: Did you ever run into a situation where somebody didn't have their ID?

M.L.W: No, for the most part, in Afghanistan they kind of stress the issue of you having it on you, and even from boot camp you're told to always have your identification card on you on your left pocket, so those little small things even from basics, stay with you. So, everybody had that identification on you, so no.

S.R: So, at any time did you ever see combat?

M.L.W: At the time no, like while I was in Afghanistan I was at a camp called Camp Leatherneck and there was a lot of gunshots and we heard explosions and stuff but it was nowhere near. We just heard it from far, from like in a distance. And I'm just fortunate enough, to never actually got to experience combat. And Lord knows I wasn't trying to, like keep me on base! I was totally fine on with being on base. Like, if the enemy came to us, then yeah, I'd engage, but I was never the type to want to go out. It's pretty much safe on base, for the most part. But then you can travel off base and go to the city in Afghanistan and go to where the locals are but, that's where the enemies were. So, for the most part we were safe on base.

S.R: So, during this time did you see any casualties?

M.L.W: No, I was one of the fortunate ones. And like for the most part, the group that I went with, that I deployed with, we all never really saw combat. We just did our jobs. In the Marine Corp, only a small percentage of marines are actually combat. We call them

infantrymen or “grunts.” We call them grunts in the Marine Corps, and only a small percentage of the Marine Corps are actually grunts. Most of the military are actually support forces. We are all trained to combat, but then our main jobs, our MOS’s, are all supports, so we never were like designated to go and engage the enemy. So, yeah, I never really got to see combat.

S.R: So, in Afghanistan, what were some of your most memorable moments?

M.L.W: While I was there, there was the *uisol* there, which is an organization that helps active duty military members. I remember going to the *uisol* almost every day. Every Thursday night we’d have karaoke so I would just go out there every Thursday night and hang out and chill with everybody and sing. That would be one of my most memorable moments just going out there and singing

S.R: That’s really cool. Actually, that sounds like fun.

M.L.W: You kind of get used to the culture around you, it seems pretty hostile, but you kind of go into it.

S.R: So, were you awarded any sort of metals, or anything like that, like citations?

M.L.W: Yeah, well, my time being that I had, I forgot what they call it. But everyone that went to Afghanistan that I deployed with- we were awarded the Afghanistan campaign medal, we were also awarded a needle ribbon, and overseas metal and there were other metals I got in the Marine Corps but I just can’t remember. So those were the things I was awarded for.

S.R: Also, I just wanted to ask, but I think I forgot. How did you get your rank of Corporal E4?

M.L.W: So, corporals from E1 to E3 which is *privy* is where you start off PFC is Private First Class in the Marine Corps and then there’s *lance* corporal. From E1 through E3, as long as you keep your nose clean and you do what’s being told, pretty much it’s just time in service. Pretty much you’re just waiting to pick up those ranks from E1 and E3. But as soon as like to get to a corporal there are certain things that you have to do like there is MCI’s which is the Marine Corps Institution. MCI’s are almost like *homework* there’s seven classes you have to take online in order to become an E4 corporal. So, there’s these classes *now-a-days* or you have to take up *lance* corporal seminar in order to pick up corporal and basically just wait. There’s a point system in the Marine Corps and you just basically wait. The scores are based on PFT which is your physical fitness test and how well you do on that. The PFT includes a three-mile run, a hundred sit ups 24/20 pull-ups. It includes a CFT which is a combat fitness test and like your rifle score, what you qualify; all of those scores combined make-up if you better pick up corporal or not and so you just basically just wait it out until your score matches whatever the Marine Corps deems because it’s on a monthly basis when you pick up a rank. So, once you hit that score depending on your MOS, depending on your job, because every job is different in

the need of that job needs a corporal or not. Depending on that job just once you reach the score you pick up.

S.R: Oh wow, so how did you stay in touch with your family in Afghanistan?

M.L.W: Nothing like, I got there late. We were the last Marines in Afghanistan. So, when we got there we had Wi-Fi and the *uisol* was a huge help. You could go there, use their phones and stuff like that. For the most part, I used Wi-Fi to stay in touch with my family.

S.R: And so, since this was your first time to Afghanistan did you experience the cultural food there?

M.L.W: Yes, meaning, that was one the perks of being a cook too. So, actually, being inside the dining facilities, we call it the Chow Hall in the Marine Corps, or being in these dining facilities like since I was like in the midnight shift. I guarded the dining facility from Midnight to 8:00 o'clock in the morning. And so, doing those hours- the locals there, the people that are actually there to work- these were actually a mixture of people. There was [sic] people from India, people from Nepal, people from Africa, like southern Africa; people from all over the places and they all just came in to just work. I thought we had it bad, but those guys get paid- I just asked them you know because I was curious, and those guys work like fourteen to fifteen hours with no days off. I mean they had been there for years and they basically get paid like 500 dollars a month.

S.R: Wow... (28:00) But then yeah for the most part, most of the Indian people there they would cook up curry, like during those late nights just for themselves and for everybody else that was there at the time. So, I actually got to eat curry that has an extra kick to it you know. And you know making food for themselves and yeah. (28:32)

S.R: Yeah, I'm Indian so, that's what we're like so I'm like yeah!

M.L.W: Yeah exactly!

S.R: So, it was kind of like a family to you.

M.L.W: Yeah!

S.R: That's cool!

S.R: So, did you experience anything like running out of supplies? Were you at all worried about that?

M.L.W: For the most part, I'd say no. I worked on for like two or three weeks *class-4 lot*. The *class-4 lot* we were in charge of distributing the water to everybody. Distributing like we always had the good space, like we had Gatorade and stuffing. So being on that lot, since we were in charge of that, I think water was kind of like, hmm... We wouldn't even run out of that because we would have it every so often. There would be trucks that would come from locals and they would have to escort them into these lots. They'd bring like a truckload full of water and stuff like that. So, no, we never really ran out of anything

S.R: So, was there anything that you did for good luck? Something special like was there a chant or maybe something that somebody gave to you that you kept and you held dear like a materialistic item?

M.L.W: For myself, no. I just went on with my day basically how I do now you know. Yeah, I would just pray every so often Now I'm a huge believer in Christ, so I would pray often. That would be my thing you know. (30:34)

S.R: So, other than the karaoke, was there anything that you and your unit entertain themselves with?

M.L.W: Yeah, actually yes there was like a guy from another unite he had a- we didn't know he had it, but he brought along an ukulele with him. And so, one day I saw him with it. And I was like, "hey, do you mind if I play it?" You know, and then he'd let us borrow it, and then yeah, we'd just sit outside like a *bar* because we all pretty much shared- because there was like six, seven people that lived in this one big room. So, we'd pretty much have our chairs outside our space, our home at the time. And we'd all just hang out. Then I'd play more ukulele and sing, so yeah.

S.R: And so, were there any particular humorous events that happened?

M.L.W: It was like when we left Afghanistan and we stopped in Romania. So, after we left, like I said, we stopped in Romania before we came back to the USA. Romania was there and we spent like 3-4 days there. And that was the first time we actually got to drink you know since being on deployment. And drinks were only a dollar and so yeah, I basically bought people drinks. From then on, I was kind of one of the guys who drank too much at that time. I don't drink anymore, hardly. It was funny I just hadn't gotten drunk in a while since being on deployment and it got kind of out of hand.

S.R: What did you think of your fellow officers and fellow soldiers? Goodness, I meant to say Marines.

M.L.W: As far as soldiers go in the Marine Corps, we don't like being called soldiers. It's just like going back to the sibling rivalry that we talked about. Soldiers are what army people are called. And Marines are just Marines. Navy people are called sailors. In the Air Force they're called airmen. But as far as my fellow Marines, wait sorry I kind of drifted away because Marines don't like being called soldiers.

S.R: I don't like calling Marines soldiers either.

M.L.W: Sorry I was just like *ah*.

S.R: Don't worry. This is not even a question I made I promise.

M.L.W: It's just for future references. I'm not a soldier.

S.R: I don't want to be a guppy.

M.L.W: What was the question again sorry?

S.R: So, what did you think of your fellow Marine Corps friends?

M.L.W: So, like as far as my company goes in food service, the company was called food service company, so the MOS main was called food service. I mean being back in Garrison which is back to your home- Now the memories like now, I think thinking back I was always the guy that was- I never had beef with anybody. I was always the guy that got along with everybody. I remember this once instance just with another setup, because sometimes there's cliques in the companies and stuff like that and that's like everywhere you know, but then I was just with this set of people and they were talking about other people who were within their company. And it was like "Yo, we don't know if we can say this in front of him" because we're usually called by our last names "Yo Liufau, you're just always cool with everybody we don't know if we can trust you, you might tell somebody else." And I was like "What the freak? I don't even care man, the beef between you guys." It's not my fault I get along with everybody. You know I never really had problems with anybody or people. So, to me they were almost like- one thing I missed being out in the civilian world, from then, almost every weekend we would go out as a big group, there was 15-20 of us and we'd go to somebody's house and party and go out to have buffalo wild wings. So, I would party often, yeah.

S.R: So, do you recall the day your service ended? (35:57)

Yeah it was June 10th, 2016. I got arrested on that day and that was the first time in my life that I ever got arrested right on the day I got off. So yeah.

L.R: Explain.

S.R: If you want I mean-

M.L.W: Yeah, I don't mind.

S.R: So, could you can explain how you got arrested on your day of leave?

M.L.W: The reason why I got arrested was because of battery. I got into an altercation with my neighbor and we always just had this- I'm a very cool dude but then like we should have addressed when the issue was first- So I kind of let it build and that's what kind of ticked me off. Because this guy was like, because my wife would smoke outside of our house and he lived upstairs. So, he'd always throw shade. Basically, every time he would leave his back door open, like his porch, and he would smell the smoke I guess coming into his house. And he would just "I wish some people would be courteous and smoke somewhere else" and just slam his door.

L.R: I would have beat his ass.

M.L.W: Yeah so that's what I'm saying, he would throw shade like that.

L.R: No one's going to tell me where the fuck I can smoke in my house. You can go back inside.

M.L.W: Yeah, you know exactly, and we brought it up to the landlord and the landlord was like “You guys are allowed to smoke outside your house and it just so happens that the smoke goes into his house, it’s not your fault. You’re allowed to smoke.”

L.R: If he doesn’t like it then he can leave.

M.L.W: And he kept doing that for months. We should have at least addressed it or at least try to deescalate the situation, but we let it build. And so, there was this one instance he came down and we was [sic] just kind of being too loud, we were playing a game of charades that night and he came down. He said “Keep your shit down.”

L.R: What?

M.L.W: Then I punched him, I just went off because I let that build and I remember all those times he was passive aggressive

L.R: See that’s what I hate when they’re not just passive aggressive, but they’re just super passive aggressive *unintelligible*

M.L.W: At least come down and say “Hey could you guys not smoke” I would respect that but

L.R: He was really nasty.

M.L.W: But it was like my fault, but he called the cops and I got arrested.

L.R: So, what happened with him? Did you say sorry?

M.L.W: Oh yeah, we hashed it out, and I brought down my battery charge to a “disturbing the peace” and I just did five days of community service. That’s it.

L.R: That’s not bad. But I mean it sucks. But it could’ve been worse.

M.L.W: It could have been worse. That was the first time in my life I had ever gotten arrested and it happened to be on the day I got out.

S.R: So, what did you do in the days and weeks after you got deployed and you were arrested?

L.R: Community service.

M.L.W: After I got out?

S.R: Yeah

M.L.W: So, after I got out, me and my - actually me and my family went through- because I didn’t save. That was one of the at least one of the biggest things I can say like with people transitioning out is that they don’t plan properly. And I was one of those, and I didn’t save enough money that I thought we would need to live at that place because yeah. So pretty much we were forced to move after that whole altercation. Me and my family went homeless. We were homeless for like two months and I was blessed to have a family take us in. You know what I mean, they took us in. And literally me and my whole family, they took us in, and they didn’t need to because at the time my wife, my wife’s sister, and my sister was living with us. So, I had my wife my two kids and these two-wonderful people living with us. So, it was a total of six people in the household.

And yeah, I was just blessed that this family took all six of us in for those two months. That's what obviously led me to come back to school because school is my main source of income due to the GI bill. So, if it wasn't for school I would not be living in my apartment right now. So, yeah.

S.R: So, when you had to move out and you we're homeless, how did that make your family feel especially because you know you had just come home. I'm just wondering how it affected your kids and your wife and your sisters.

M.L.W: I never really thought about how my wife really felt. Because my wife pulled through a lot for me. I owe my wife a lot, but if it wasn't for my wife oh my goodness like my wife at that time my wife was the backbone that I needed. She's mostly my source of emotional support, and I cannot even explain to even thank her for being there for me. Because you know how in America men are supposed to be the breadwinners. We are to support financially our families. I couldn't do that at that time. So, for myself, that was the first time in my whole entire life I contemplated suicide. Of course, through high school I think people are for the most part You're just a little kid and you think about killing yourself, whatever, I mean actually don't follow through. I least in my life I can say like I was the most depressed that time. It sucked for myself that I couldn't be that financial support my family needed. (43:00)

S.R: So, I'm going to assume, but I'm going to ask anyways. Your wife was all for you going back to school?

M.L.W: Yeah, most definitely, anything that helped us to get ourselves on our feet again she was most definitely. My wife like I said, from the beginning if it wasn't for my wife I wouldn't ever join the Marine Corps, let alone the military. I thought about it because my *unintelligible*, but my wife was the actual push if my wife didn't tell me at the time I did enlist- I forgot to say this, but my mom knew that I was about to join the Marine Corps and she was against it. The time I was about to swear in and actually enlist in the Marine Corps, my mom was threatening me. Threatening me to kick us out of the house. "You'd better not come home. You'd better not join them. You'd better not." I just put my phone down after I heard that voicemail. And I just had a heart to heart conversation with my wife and she was pregnant with our daughter. And I told her, my mom aside, because I grew up in a single parent home. My mom was like my other emotional support. My mom aside was the big step for me. And I told my wife "You think we should go through this? Should I enlist in the Marine Corps? And my wife said "Yes, let's do it." From then on, she's been my, almost everything. (44:44)

S.R: That's so nice, we're getting the feels, so-

L.R: Also, I would like to make a comment really quick you were talking about. It's kind of awkward but not awkward and it's totally *unintelligible*. About your whole depressiveness and contemplating suicide when you went home. I know that's a really

big issue now and it has always been with a lot of homeless veterans with the lack of money or health care and stuff like that. Were there any places that you went to get that help? Or anything like no one wanted to help you or anything because I know that it's a big issue where some places don't even try and it's really difficult. (45:32)

MLW: At the time being the only place was that family that helped us that I knew of. There are resources out there that I have actually worked for one of the companies, the EDD, the employment development department, where you actually have a veteran section to help out vets and it's just like-- I didn't know this until I actually went to find out myself. I actually had to go out and find out myself. I'm kind of an advocate of a person helping themselves in the way of like an *unintelligible*. Like go and find resources yourself but I mean at the time I believed these resources would have made themselves more like "hey how do I actually find you more"

L.R: Because I didn't really know about it until I'd go in San Diego or LA. You see a lot of homeless people, a lot of older homeless men. There are women who have like a mental illness, they have PTSD or something like that. And those places that give out those resources or like counseling and stuff. I feel like they should advertise it more because it's definitely more needed. I don't know why I never really hear about it. But I wanted to know if you ever came across it or if there should be more out there for you guys you know?

M.L.W: I think it really should be, because there are a lot of vets that struggle finding places. Especially because a lot of vets I know that come to the veteran center are not originally from here. They just stay here because it's kind of fun here. You know what I mean, it's kind of nice out here and you want to make a living and most of them are either renting out a room to a stranger's house. They don't live together so they're all at these random homes and stuff like that. As far as the resources I have found there's also waitlists. There's even waitlists for those shelters, and the waitlists are like three, four, five, six months. Even if a veteran goes homeless like immediately homeless that have to wait.

L.R: And it could take a long time. I actually did an event for my psychology class and it's like altruism so it's about helping others and stuff like that, and it's really fun. We had to go to Vista, super bad area, would not move there ever, but it was actually really enlightening and interesting to see. We went to go plant a bunch of stuff for like a woman's and family shelter. and it was really surprising to see that there was a really long wait list and some people didn't get in until weeks or months later and there's children there and I don't know. I just felt there was just not enough of that and it's so upsetting even with homeless veterans and with children they have to go through that. And the government doesn't really care and they're kind of like "well-" And this one

wasn't funded by the government *unintelligible*. And it's hard, it's a lot of money but it's crazy. So, I thought it was just like "whoa."

S.R: So, I also had another question that is sort of kind of related to that, personally I have noticed it. There's a huge, also another issue with stolen valor. So, I know you're the type of person that usually wouldn't get bothered by that but.

M.L.W: I'm bothered.

S.R: Yeah, some people-

M.L.W: I still have that pride.

S.R: So, I was just wondering how you feel about stolen valor and how you approach it.

M.L.W: At least from-- I've never seen it personally but--

L.R: I have!

M.L.W: Really?

S.R: Me too.

L.R: You know at my work.

M.L.W: Goodness gracious.

L.R: I work at the Nana and Pop Pop's here in Oceanside. Come through if you want good ice-cream.

S.R: I want to go there!

L.R: We give out military discount so it's like 10%, 50% off. And literally that where all the marines go. Camp Pendleton is right there so you know people come in with their buddies or whatever. And if you've noticed if you've been to downtown oceanside or whatever they have this one store that sells military gear things like your outfit, stuff like that boots yeah.

M.L.W: There's like three or four shops there.

L.R: Yeah there's a whole bunch and they were all dressed up with their gear. I'm like "hey how're you doing" and they're like "oh, I'm doing good" and I'm like "alright what can I get for you?" and then like oh whatever. And then he's like "do I get a discount?" and I'm like "yeah sure, you got to show me the id though." I just can't give it to you, come on. And then they'll be like "oh, I don't have it and I'm like well, you're supposed to so. But there was one guy, I wasn't there but my sister was at work and the guy had confessed because she was "really, I don't think you're in the military guy, like you don't--" Like the hair wasn't cut, he just had the hat on and he just didn't really look like he was the part.

M.L.W: And what did he say?

L.R: He just said sorry I'm not an actual marine.

M.L.W: I'd be super pissed but still.

L.R: And she literally told me "Get out, get out." I wish I was there that would've been crazy.

S.R: I mean I've seen it.

L.R: It's ridiculous!

S.R: Yeah, I've seen it myself in this grocery store.

L.R: People have no shame.

S.R: And I'm like "you're trying to tell me, you're wearing your full uniform and you don't have your military id" because if you're wearing your full uniform, you're supposed to have it right?

M.L.W: for the most part unless something's going on.

S.R: Yeah, but you're going to the grocery store, right?

L.R: How're you supposed to get back on the base?

S.R: and they were buying- like okay- they are like "homeless veteran give me money" type of crap and I was like "you cannot be serious, no, you are not military" and then I walked away. And then they look like they were really flustered because even the way their hair was cut. Your hair wouldn't be long you know. I just felt like- that type of thing really bothers me because there's veterans out there, they need help and you are taking away from that. Or you're using a discount that you don't deserve because you never--

S.R: Oh! That guy just did a backflip over there, he ate it. He fell on his back and he's walking away like nothing ever happened

L.R: There he goes.

S.R: sorry!! Maybe you should close the window.

S.R: I was just wondering how you felt about that because I asked another vet in our class and he's like "Uh, it doesn't really bother me."

M.L.W: He's a Marine?

L.R: Traitor!

S.R: Was he a marine?

L.R: Everyone that we have right now is a Marine and we don't have any women either.

S.R: So, anyways, we're going to go more focused now because we yeah okay sorry-- I know that we're not trying to waste your time.

S.R: How did you go about choosing your communications major?

M.L.W: I don't know, at the time, when I first-- cause like the family that helped me, we all went to the same church and so after I got back on my feet I started to go to church heavy. Like, I started diving into that Christian community and I really want to-- like--my mom, ever since I was little, my mom would always tell me, I still remember vividly, or

distinctly in my memories that my mom would tell me every so often when I was kid, “Son, you’re going to be a pastor one day.”

L.R: Ha-ha!

M.L.W: I was like, “Mom, no.” No, and she just kept telling me this every other year. And one day, I was looking to schools that taught like ministry and stuff like that, and since I was just coming to MiraCosta at the time, I was like, “Oh, hey, what degree can I get to get into ministry and stuff like that?” And so, yeah, at first, I was a liberal arts or something like that because they didn’t have anything like that. Because the school I wanted to go into was Azusa, Azusa Pacific. Then, I was just thought about it-- because I took an intercultural communication class with Professor Anthony and I really enjoyed the aspect of communications. And then I was like, “Hey! Pastors communicate!” You know what I mean? Like preachers? I still want to be a preacher, I don’t know about a pastor. I went through this whole phase this past year. I still want to do preacher work, but I also want to have an actual job within the communications field. It was something I was already good at; it was something I was already comfortable with. So, I just decided on choosing communication.

S.R: And so, did the pastor/preaching thing get you into spoken word?

M.L.W: So actually, it was the spoken word first. I actually didn’t consider actually becoming a preacher until like a year ago. Like I just remember my mom always telling me that and I was like, “why not try it out?” I mean, at first, I wanted to become a pastor, but now I’d rather become a preacher instead. There’s just so much like dynamics that go into becoming a pastor.

L.R: Sorry, but what are the differences between them? Because I know there is like preachers, ministers, and there’s pastors, priests..

M.L.W: It all depends-- Priests are usually like Catholics, but like Pastors-- or pretty much like priests, they actually take care of the church, they have a congregation that they have to address and they have people that look up to them and stuff-- they actually much run the church. Preachers can just come in, like guest speakers or something.

L.R: Oh! I see.

M.L.W: They’re not responsible of the church. Yeah!

L.R: Okay ha-ha. There we go, right.

M.L.W: And Ministers-- you can become a minister- like people who like officiate weddings or people that do funerals.

L.R: Oh okay.

M.L.W: And that’s all throughout any religion, you can just become a minister. So yeah.

S.R: Okay, and so kind of getting more into your spoken word. What kind of pieces do you write? If you write them. Ha-ha.

M.L.W: Yeah, I write all my work, pieces. Not ghostwriting! I'm not Drake.

L.R: DRAKE!

M.L.W: *laughs*

S.R: Drake just kind of writes down things--

M.L.W: Well he has a ghostwriter supposedly. Ghost writing in the community means that somebody writes for you.

L.R: And you see everybody does that-- It's annoying!

M.L.W: Yeah, a lot of artists do it. There's not a lot of unique or original artists. Someone usually writes their songs.

M.L.W: Yeah so, the pieces I write-- I just wrote one a month ago because actually one of the veterans took his life a month ago and he came to MiraCosta. And it's just like-- his name was Spencer and I remember talking to him like literally one of the things we talked about is like "Hey, name three songs, that if you were to go tomorrow, that we would remember you by?" I just felt like-- I feel like that at that moment, he would have opened up then. I think that is pretty serious question. Like if you were to go tomorrow, what songs would we remember you by?

L.R: I already know. Sleepwalk.

M.L.W: Yeah see?

L.R: It's one the songs-- not saying anything is going to happen, but that song is timeless.

M.L.W: Yeah ha-ha, exactly and everybody has these songs, and I was just asking people in general. But at that time, I thought it was an opportunity for him to open up. But yeah, he took his life a week after that. And that was my latest piece, I wrote a suicide piece. And yeah so, but most of my pieces-- before this suicide piece-- I wrote a piece about me growing up in Hawaii. And how like my childhood was in Hawaii... Like people see Hawaii as this paradise. No. Or, A vacation home.

L.R: It's not always like that.

M.L.W: Yeah, Hawaii wasn't like that. At one point in the 2000s, Hawaii led America and per capita with the most meth users, and one of those users was my dad. I remember in sixth grade, he pulled out-- like he was always in and out of our house, so my mom and my grandpa raised us. But one thing that I say is, that I love my dad and I never resented him to this day. Even if he was hardly in my life, but I never hated him. And because of this-- this moment, because he was honest with me, he was like, "Son," you know, it was just like a dad and son talk, and he just pulled out a pack of rocks and he was like, "this is

why I'm not home, I'm out here in the streets just doing this." And from then, I respected my father. Always did and always will. He's passed, he passed away, but yeah.

S.R: I'm so sorry about that.

M.L.W: No problem, but that is a part of past pieces. And I have a proposal piece too, just to make lighter things.

L.R: Oh, for your wife?

M.L.W: Yeah, because I've never actually proposed to my wife. Cause our families knew each other. You know what I mean? We were always together. Before we got married-- I knew her two years prior-- at the time before we got married, we been together for three years. Our families knew each other, they were like, "Hey, you guys should just get married." And we was [sic] like, "Sure!" Ha-ha, so we just got married. But, I never actually got to propose. So, I wrote a piece of a proposal for her that I'm saving--so until--

L.R: That's crazy.

S.R: That's so nice.

L.R: That's different though; I like that you're saving it for one specific moment or something. That's good.

S.R: Yeah, that's good. So, do you feel that your military life has influenced your love for spoken word?

M.L.W: No, I'd say-- I didn't even write when I was in. It kind of like veered me away from it because I was just so...

L.R: Busy?

M.L.W: Yeah, so busy, and the military life was just all that I was consumed by. And I still was into it, like I would listen to pieces while I was in and I was always inspired by it, but then I never written anything while I was in. So, I wouldn't say my military experience contributed anything to my spoken word.

S.R: So, you kind of just found it after all that stuff happened?

M.L.W: Yeah, basically. Yeah.

S.R: Is there anything else you'd like us to add to the interview or anything you'd like to talk about?

M.L.W: I would say at least, what the military did teach me like from transitioning was just... One of the biggest things that I took away from the military that a mentor of mine, he is a Warrant Officer now, but at the time he was a staff sergeant. Staff sergeant Tijerino, we used to call him staff sergeant T.J, but my last year in he was one of my supervisors, and I'm glad he was one of my supervisors because he brought a different mentality that I was never accustomed to in the military. But I remember one saying-- It's always in my head to this day, that he told me-- because he always saw something in me. Before I got

out, I was always like... I was just like waiting to get out. I did my job barely minimum. Like I was just like-- If there's any responsibilities that ever came up, I'd never jump to it, I'd let other people do it. But he always something in me, so he called me out on it and he called me into his office. He's like, "Why are you like that? I don't see you like all these other Corporals just sitting here-- pretty much waiting to get out." Cause most of the people waiting to get out were with six months and less of service. Like we did nothing! Like nothing! If anything came up, we were like, "Hey! Here's the new guy!" We always passed that responsibility to someone else. And that was the mentality that every Corporal I knew was like almost. And we kind of stopped me like, "Hey, if you think that attitude is going to change when you get out, you're always going to be like that. Like even if you're in the military, you will not." And then so he always said, "The military doesn't change your character, it only reveals it." So, like it already brings out who you already are. And then from that moment I was like, "Man, that's such a unique perspective."

L.R: That was deep.

M.L.W: Yeah! You know what I mean? It was such a unique perspective that like everybody talks about like, "oh man the military" -- like no doubt the military does change you, but then for him to say that it only reveals who you are. And that's like, "Man was I really like this?" And from then on, I started looking at it differently, like life and just work in general. And he always told me, to always have like-- like this one time also I disappointed him one more time, and he told me, "You know, you have to have responsibility like a mother. Just imagine if you were away on deployment, you know what I mean? If you were away from your home-- like what happens--And he asks me, "Who takes care of your kids when you're sick and away?" I was like "My wife." And then he's lie, "Well how about when your wife gets sick? Who takes care of her?" And I was like, "I don't know.. I guess whoever is there with her." And he was like, "No she does it on her own. You know what I mean? That's what mothers do. You have to have responsibility like a mother." And so, that's how he always brought this mentality to work. Just take responsibility. And you know how people come up with excuses for being late?

L.R: Yeah!

M.L.W: Like, "Hey, no--"

L.R: Yeah, my dad fired a guy like that. He always came in with something else, like every day.

M.L.W: But yeah, he was just like straight to it, "No, tell me what actually happened." I said, "I slept past my alarm." And he was like, "Okay, we'll work on that then." You know what

I mean? He just wanted to get straight to the point, he didn't want any of that extra B.S. He just taught me a valuable lesson. Yeah, and that's it.

L.R: That's crazy. That's great. Also, would it be cool if we heard you-- one of your spoken-- pieces? I don't know if you remember any--

S.R: Tomorrow right?

M.L.W: On Thursday! It's depending on the time but there's going to be a veteran ceremony On Thursday from-- one College Hour, from twelve to one, so-- in the cafeteria.

L.R: Thursday in the cafeteria?

M.L.W: Yeah so, I'm going to be performing that suicide piece.

L.R: Oh my gosh, what time? I'm sorry.

M.L.W: From twelve to one.

L.R: From twelve to one... I will be here. Definitely want to get you doing that piece I think it'll be really cool. Definitely want to hear it.

S.R: I also have one more question.

M.L.W: Sure!

S.R: Okay. So, is there anything you'd like to say to other veterans or future veterans who get out the military and are planning to go to school?

M.L.W: I would say, like, almost like everything in your Marine Corps career, or just the military in general. I would say that to future vets, to take-- to take pretty much what my supervisor taught me. The way you act now in the military or when you transition out is the way outside in the world. So, if you don't take your military career seriously, you won't take school seriously. And so, I would say, actually plan. Have a six months-- three to six months-- Like if you go back home, then that's okay. You have the blanket of your family, you know, that safety net. But, if you want to make a living out here in California in particular, I would say plan ahead and make sure you know your resources, reach out, go out and find your resources that can help veterans with smooth transitioning. So, yeah, I'm good.

L.R: That was great!

S.R: That was good!

L.R: I think we're done! That went awesome!! Yup! (1:11:38)