

**Summary of Oral History Transcript**  
**Student, Citizen, Soldier: Oral History and Student Veterans**

**Bisson, Jonathan**

U.S. Army, 68W, E-4

*Interviewer:*

Interview conducted by Melissa Kowalick, Salem State University, on 4/07/2016

*Summary of Transcript:*

Jonathan Bisson of Woonsocket, RI, joined the Army shortly after graduating from Burillville High School in 2011. He received his EMT license and training at Fort Campbell, KY, had a seven-month deployment to Afghanistan as part of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, and returned to civilian life in December 2014. Bisson served as a station medic in the Chankani district of eastern Afghanistan near the Pakistan border. He met his wife Arielle, who also served as a medic in the military, but left when she became pregnant with their twin sons. Bisson discusses balancing family life with the military, the role of medics in a combat zone, how the horrors of war led him to pursue a career as an occupational therapist.

Jonathon Bisson

Narrator

Melissa Kowalick

Salem State University

Interviewer

April 7th, 2016

at Salem State University

Salem, Massachusetts

Melissa Kowalick: Hello, today is April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016. My name is Melissa Kowalick, and I am joined by Jonathon Bisson, who is a U.S. army veteran who served in Afghanistan. Hello Jonathon.

Jonathon Bisson: Hi.

MK: So my first question for you is where exactly in Rhode Island did you grow up, and what was the town like?

JB: I grew up in Burrillville, Rhode Island. It's a small rural town- fairly big- with a small population. Just to give you an idea, my graduating class of high school was 160.

MK: Wow.

JB: So a really small town. Not much diversity at all. It's pretty much 99% white. That's pretty much it.

MK: OK. Now when you were a kid, did you dream about going into the military or did you have other careers and aspirations in mind?

JB: Honestly, as a kid I had no idea what I wanted to do. That's essentially where I came up with the idea to join the army. I was single, I had nothing going on with my life. I wasn't the best student in high school, so I decided to join the army.

MK: OK. How did your family and friends feel about your decision to enlist?

JB: I don't think they were surprised by my decision, but I feel like my mom took it the hardest. You know, I was the baby leaving home, so I was the youngest, so I think that really struck her. My friends and family, just- they knew I could do it. That's pretty much it.

MK: You said you were the baby of the family, so did you have like older siblings?

JB: I do, I have two older siblings. I have an older brother and an older sister.

MK: And they didn't go into the army at all?

JB: No. The only one who served in the army was my Pepe. Who passed before I had gone. He passed before I was born. And he was the only veteran in my family that I know of.

MK: Where did he serve?

JB: Not sure. He was in military intelligence. We know nothing about his military service.

MK: Oh really?

JB: Just that he was in the army and that was it.

MK: OK. What was basic training like?

JB: Basic training was...it was interesting. (Pause) It was a new experience for me, however, I played football in high school so I felt like my football coach was a lot harder than my drill sergeants were. So for me it was, it was pretty easy. I had been pushed around like that before. It really wasn't a big thing, I got some thick skin. Physically demanding, you know, obviously. I was tired. And it was- it was an experience. It was, it was kind of cool to do some things I have never done before. Kind of get out of my comfort zone, see some people I have never seen before, and just get a bunch of experience from all over the world.

MK: Was there an average day for basic training camp? Did you have a schedule you did a lot?

JB: Every day was scheduled. So we'd wake up- you know- pretty brutally sometimes. Usually early in the morning, five- you know- sometimes four in the morning. We- we'd get up, we'd go down to formation. You know, they'd come around banging the trash cans like you see in the movies and stuff, and flipping your mattresses. You'd get up, you'd make your bed. You'd go downstairs for formation. They'd go inspect your beds and your rooms and stuff to make sure they were clean, and just- you know- perfect. And then if- if you screwed that up, they would come and destroy your bunk, and you'd have to fix it. And then come back down and inspect it again. Usually it was pretty good at that point, you kinda knew what was going on. Then you'd go to PT. You know, you'd do physical training for an hour. The army has a set physical training- you know- set of instructions for basic training. So you'd do that, so usually an hour and a half. Come back. Shower. Get in your uniform. Go eat breakfast. Get out of there. Sometimes you'd do some- some classes. It depends on the day. You do classes, training, you go to the range, you do a ruck march. Some things like that. You'd eat lunch. After lunch, you'd do training or classes. Eat dinner. Go upstairs. We usually got smoked after that, just for any reason you could think of. And that when on till about sometimes 10 o'clock, sometimes earlier- you know- then we'd just kinda hang out and go to sleep after that.

MK: OK. Do you keep in touch with friends you have made in the military?

JB: Yes. Actually, a lot- a lot of the guys from my unit that I deployed with I still talk to now. I got one- My bunk mate from basic training I'm still in contact with him every once in a while.

MK: Oh really?

JB: Yeah. But yeah I'm very much in contact with the people I have met in the military.

MK: Are you close with them?

JB: More close with the ones that I deployed with. It's kind of a- it's a certain bond you get, you know, watching each other's back and just making sure they're doing the right thing and you're kinda staying alive together. You know, you just watch out for each other.

MK: OK. I see you were deployed in Afghanistan, where specifically were you, and what was your role there?

JB: We were in regional command east, which is on the eastern side of Afghanistan. We were right on the border of Pakistan, in a little town called Chānkāni. My role there was to provide aid station support for injured, sick, and trauma victims, if- if you want to call it that. They could come at any time. We kinda, you know, I was a- we had a doctor over us. There was me and my superior. We were the aid station medics. Then we had- you know- the line medics that were with the infantry guys that went on patrols with them. So that was my role, just to provide medical support in any way that I possibly could

MK: So if people were injured in the line of duty, and then they came back to you? Is that what you were saying?

JB: It- it depends. So On a normal day- on a normal day where nothing happens, some sick guys would come in, you know they'd come in with stubbed toes, and- you know- some hematoma in their nails, and stuff, and we'd treat that. We had- you know- basically like a- like a little E.R. kind of deal. So we'd treat stuff like that. We'd also treat like sports related injuries from- from physical training. If anything did happen, and there was a trauma, I was- I was in charge of my table, which was where we treated our trauma- our trauma patients. So I was the head of my table, and I directed other medics under me what to do and when to do it.

MK: Did basic training help you for that experience at all? Like prepare you for that?

JB: Absolutely not. (Laughs) I have to say, absolutely not. It kinda just gets you in a state of being mentally prepared for- you know- kinda, kinda anything can happen. That's about it. I think that's the only thing basic training really did for me. It got me in a little bit better shape, and mentally prepared me for the worst.

MK: So in regards to what you had to do, did you learn how to do it by observing others? Or did- was- did you have a mentor that helped teach you?

JB: Well after basic training, you go to what's called advanced individual training. So that's where you actually learn your job.

MK: OK.

JB: So that's where I learned to be a medic. So we went through EMT school. So we got certified as a basic emergency medical technician as a civilian, that's the civilian license. And

then there's like two section to the course. So there's the civilian side, and there's the military side and that's where you learn to deal with more trauma, and- you know- blasts, gunshot wounds, things like that. And then after I got out of AIT I went to my real unit, which was 101<sup>st</sup> airborne division 4<sup>th</sup> brigade, 100 and, let's see, 1506 infantry division, or battalion. And that's where you really get it, in my opinion. You don't really get it at AIT, it's kind of just the basics. And then you have superiors and- you know- peers that have been there for a while. So that's where I really got my training from. One NCO really, we had- we had training plans, we did it every single day, and we kind of just got repetitions in of patient assessments, and certain things that could happen. That's where it came from.

MK: In AIT, did you want to do- go into the like the medical field at all? Was that your decision?

JB: That was my goal when I signed my contract. I wanted to be in the medical field so that way I would have something when I got out. You know, that-that was definitely my goal. When I got to AIT it was kind of confirmed. You know, I- I just had a passion for it. That's what I like to do.

MK: OK. Was Afghanistan like you expected it to be?

JB: (pause) I think so. It was definitely a culture shock. I mean coming from a small town and not seeing much, and then you go to a-essentially a third world country, it's, it's different. What I expected, the people and the surroundings were what I expected. When I got there, (pause) it-it, I don't know... (Pause) it was definitely, shocking. The unit that we replaced told us that-you know, nothing really happened while they were there and- you know that it was going to be kind of chill. So it was kinda just like, kinda like OK, it's not really what I expected. I expected to go into war and I thought it was going to be every day piling to the ground, out with the guys getting the bad guys I guess. So not what I expected in certain ways, but in others, yes.

MK: So it sounds like you had a lot of down time. So what did you do if you had any down time?

JB: Honestly I slept a lot. (Laughs) I slept as much as I could. I worked out a lot. You know- we had an Xbox there, which was kind of cool. We actually just started playing golf on Xbox. So yeah it was basically wake up, eat, go work out, come back, you know- do some medical training. Our doctor would give us classes and we would teach courses as well, and then maybe do some more workouts somewhere after that. Go eat again, it was kinda- it was a lot of downtime. At night I would go skype with my wife, who I had met in AIT. So yeah, I'd talk with her until-until it was time to go to bed, and then I'd go to bed and do it all over again the next day.

MK: Did your wife serve at all?

JB: Yeah, she was- she was actually a medic as well. When we had- we got pregnant, we got pregnant with twins not long after we got to my duty station and then she ended up getting out because she had to care for our children.

MK: Let's see. What was your understanding of why the United States was in Afghanistan? Did you agree with the mission?

JB: Absolutely no idea. Absolutely no idea. We actually had a general come in and ask us if we knew what- what was going on. We said, "Honestly sir, not a clue." He was kind of infuriated by that. So he took off his rank, which was not something generals do, and he said- you know, "tell me like it is, what's going on?" Like what do you guys know? And we had nothing to tell him. We had no idea why we were there, we were just told that we were going to go there, close down some FAWBS, and we were going to leave. That was that. So I guess, all we knew, you know- we're closing down some FAWBS.

MK: That's all they told you?

JB: That was basically it. They never really came out and said it we just kind of knew that that what was going to happen before you left. But why we were going out on missions, why we were going to get guys -you know- near the Pakistan border and stuff, we had no idea.

MK: What did you love and hate about being deployed in Afghanistan?

JB: I'll describe my deployment pretty simply. It was a lot of just relaxed, chill time with bits of chaos. Honestly, I just- it was, it was better to be- you know it was more relaxed out there, you know uniform standards were kind of relaxed, shaving standards were kind of relaxed. A lot of the stuff that has to do with the actual military was the stuff that I had liked because we didn't really have to do it, if that makes sense. So-so I guess if you were going to say I loved one thing that was it. What I hated about being in Afghanistan was the possibility of getting killed, and, you know, my army buddies getting killed in an instant. That pressure, it takes a certain weight on your shoulders. You're always thinking, you're always on watch, you always- 'what is this guy doing, where's he going, why is he driving that truck down there, why is he walking funny, why did he just look at me like that?' It's always a constant 'is he going to kill me,' you know the locals and stuff. So that- just constantly being on guard is definitely the thing I hated the most.

MK: You described bits of chaos. Could you name maybe one chaotic scenario you had while deployed?

JB: Yeah we actually had a 107 rocket come and land on a building that was right next to the aid station. So we had a red light that was right on the aid station at night so people would know where we were, and it seemed like they were aiming for it. So the rocket went and hit the next building where- you know- thirty, forty guys are sleeping. Nobody died, thank god. The guys whose bunk was hit were just walking out for guard. But there was a lot of- a lot of shrapnel wounds. We had a couple guys that were pretty severely injured-injured. Nobody died that day, but it was definitely an experience. There was a lot, a lot of trauma, I would say. I mean there was ten guys that were pretty critically wounded.

MK: Wow. Would you describe that as your most memorable moment from Afghanistan?

JB: (Pause) Most memorable in a trauma, yes. Most memorable, no. My most memorable moment was- we-when I went on a mission to Bagram, which was the air force base not that far from where we were. It was a 10 hour drive, but we'd go slow. When we got there we had learned that, you know, an IED had hit just back where we had come from on a patrol and a couple of guys died, they got killed. So when the hero flights came in, that's when they bring the stretchers with the flags over them, they came in and we actually had to receive the bodies off the stretchers. We did a ceremony for them and stuff, and it was definitely my most memorable memory.

MK: Wow. What obstacles did you face while you were deployed in Afghanistan?

JB: Honestly, like I- we had some training, so I think the first trauma that we had seen was- it was just eye-opening. You know, it's different when you start to touch real human blood and start to stuff gauze in a real human body. It's a little different. So I- I would definitely say that was the biggest obstacle. You know, just getting your hands dirty essentially. And honestly, being away from family was a huge obstacle for me. Like it was tough. Leaving was, it was very hard.

MK: Is that what you missed the most from home?

JB: Oh yeah. Yeah. My little baby boys. I mean I left when they were- you know, seven/eight months, and my wife was there, alone, with twins. So, I don't know, it was, just devastating. It really was.

MK: Did you get to keep in contact with your wife a lot and talk to her a lot?

JB: Yeah, we talked every night that we could. Obviously there's some nights that you can't, whether that be due to missions or when somebody gets killed you go in a blackout, you can't talk to anybody until their families are notified, so that way word doesn't get out, so it makes sense. I think those were the scariest times for my wife. She had told me she had been on the NATO's website, checking to see who was killed and stuff like that. We did get to talk a lot, fortunately. I think that's a lot different than wars from the past. It definitely helps because I was always in contact with her. I told her as much as I possibly could without giving away positions and stuff like that. But yeah, I was very fortunate that we were able to talk a lot because I could have never made it through without her.

MK: Was it over the phone? Or could you skype her and see her face to face?

JB: Sometimes it was skype, depending on the internet connection. Obviously it wasn't what we have here.

MK: Yeah

JB: So sometimes it was very broken, but yeah we'd have phone contact when-when we couldn't do that. So I'd have to like call the Rhode Island National Guard and, you know my wife- they would connect me to my wife's phone.

MK: What were your interactions with the Afghani locals like? If you had any interactions?

JB: I did have some interactions with them because they had certain jobs on our base. We had a water guy, a trash guy, there all locals. So I mean, from my experiences, they're kind of like friendly, but mysterious. I don't know if that just has to do with my thoughts- could they kill me at any moment? So you're kind of skeptical with them, but otherwise-otherwise, those locals were pretty friendly. But when you're out, out in the towns and driving through their neighborhoods, sometimes they throw rocks at you, sometimes they love pens- the little kids love pens, so you know they'd ask for pens in their language. I don't know the words anymore, but I did when I was there. But yeah, there's some people that will just be looking at you like this (gives look) and you're just like 'what's going on.' So yeah, there's a lot of friendly people over there, but there's also people who hate us and don't want us over there. It's understandable.

MK: Yeah. It's unnerving a little bit.

JB: Yeah.

MK: Interacting with them, did you have a translator or was it just kind of like you trying to figure out each other's languages?

JB: So yes, we did have translators, but obviously there's times where, you know, you don't have one. We used to- we treated some of their guys when they would get injured, too. We'd go over to their aid station because we had like a shared base with the Afghani army, and we'd go over there and treating patients. Treating their patients was pretty difficult without a translator because you don't know what they're saying. They're just screaming, you don't know what's going on, you kinda just gotta go off your vital signs and that's it. You really don't have much else to go off of. So that was difficult, but most of the time, if it was like a- like a conversation, we'd have a translator. If it was critical that we talk, there was a translator, if it wasn't it was just kind of like (motions), how are you (laughs) - they don't know what you're saying kind of just smile at each other.

MK: Do you miss anything about the military?

JB: Do I miss anything about the military? (Pause) I do and I don't. I don't know- it's kinda- you always know where you stand in the military. You know how to move up, you know what you need to do on a daily basis. You know what you need to do, know how to move up, you know where to move up, who to talk to, what to do and when to do it, and you're told that from the day you get into basic training. When you get out you're kinda just like, what do I do now? You kinda gotta- you're not told what to do anymore you have to figure it out on your own. So it's a sense of stability. It's good to have. I think a lot of veterans go through that where they're like, "Crap, where do I stand now?" And they kinda got to put their feet on the ground, without knowing where the ground is, if that makes sense. So that would be the thing I miss, the stability of it, you know- knowing where you stand.

MK: OK, so I guess going off of that, what was the transition from military life to student life like?

JB: It was interesting. I mean, when I got here I was kinda- so we had moved and I was enrolled at Salem state, so when I got here I kind of had to hit the ground running. I had a couple weeks

where I kinda had to get all my books together, get all the stuff I needed, and I didn't know what to expect. When I got here, it was kind of- honestly, it was like high school, but you do your own thing, which is a lot better from what I experienced in high school. People hounded me about my homework, but now that I'm not hounded I actually do it. (Laughs) it was definitely a change. Easy- it was easy and hard at the same time. Just cause I didn't know what to expect, and I kinda just had to go right after it, there was like no smooth transition. It was just a jump from one to the next.

MK: Were you planning on being a student, like when you were in the military? Were you thinking about going back to school?

JB: When I got back from deployment, I started to see the guys that were injured that I had treated back in Afghanistan, and they were going through a lot of surgeries, a lot of therapies and stuff, and I actually came upon the field of occupational therapy. Everyone I talked to said their occupational therapist was great, he provided me with so much relief, and you know he really knows what he's doing. So that's the field I ultimately decided on, and I started shadowing occupational therapists when I was in the military, and I just grew a passion for helping people, without being involved in trauma. It's just like a low stress kind of therapy, and that's essentially what I wanted. I wanted to get out of the emergency medical field and get back into the nine to five, kind of just see your patients, and do your thing. They're not like- they're wounded and they're hurt, but not to the point where they're screaming, you know they're just trying to get better at the point.

MK: Yeah. So why did you decide to go to Salem state?

JB: (laughs) Actually, it has a lot to do with the veterans benefits. So I was living in Rhode island, so if I were going to school in Rhode island, the money is not as much as if I would have come here. You know make the two hour trek for a thousand more bucks a month, and, you know, it made sense to me. That's why.

MK: Are there any other veteran benefits you get through here?

JB: They pay my tuition and fees, you know, from my GI bill. I get a monthly housing allowance, and that's it. You know there's obvious other little things, like we have a veterans center, you know where we get free printers, there's a couple of computers up there, some books that people have loaned, so if you need a textbook and it's there you can take it. You can go up there and get coffee, and water, whatever you want, so there's little things like that. There's always a support group within the veteran community. It's very good. But yeah, as far as other benefits, financially, not really. That's pretty, that's pretty much it. It's pretty cut and dry at that point.

Professor Darien: Priority registration.

JB: Yeah, that too.

MK: That's always a bonus.

JB: Yeah.

MK: So have you made a lot of friends on campus that are also veterans?

JB: Not really. A few just in passing. I'll go to the veterans center, hang out, do a paper, or stuff. I'll get a cup of water or something. Not really, I just do what I have to do and go home. My schedules pretty full when I'm here. I made it that way so I could get back and help my wife with the kids. I think with someone who's not married it would be a little different. I would be here you know like 4 days a week, kinda just slow and relaxed, but I just get it all crammed in and then I go home. So yeah, I think- If I was single it would be different, but I am married, so I like to spend time with my wife. Any chance I can get I go home.

MK: Yeah. That's understandable. OK. How do you like school here?

JB: I like it. The professors are really good, from what I've seen so far. I am moving, though. At the end of the semester I'm going back down to Tennessee. I have a house down there, I bought a house when I was in the military. I'll be finishing my degree down there, but from what I've seen this is a really good school. As far as your professors go, and the education you're actually receiving, I really think that there is something there. A lot of the professors, they actually care about their students learning, not just like 'did you hand in your assignment', it's do you get the concept. I don't know, it really is a good experience to get some of these professors. They really know what they're talking about, and they really want to help you. They help those who want to be helped. And if you don't, it's kind of your own thing. You're paying for school so, (laughs) if you're not going to do it, I'm not going to force you, which is, I guess, college as a whole.

MK: Yeah.

JB: But yeah from what I've experienced the school here it's good. I'm doing well, my professors really get it, if I need help they're always there. My advisors always, you know, always very helpful.

MK: Do you tell people that you're a veteran? Like your professors or fellow classmates?

JB: I think it comes up in almost every single class.

MK: Really?

JB: Because I have experiences that the student coming out of high school does not. So when I tell them, you should really shadow, you should really shadow your profession that you want to go in, don't pick business as a major and say, "Oh I want to make a lot of money," that's not-that's not very smart. So it ends up coming out in certain courses. I'm taking a social psych course, and it comes out a lot there because I have a different social experience than most students. I think it comes out, it really does, in every single class. It ends up coming out.

MK: Do you feel a kind of certain disconnect between you and fellow students because you have had a military background and most students don't?

JB: Absolutely. I feel like (pause) I feel like a lot of people don't understand what's going on in the world so they're kind of still small minded in that sense. And I was too coming out of high school, that's why I really think that the military really benefitted me, in that sense. I was really

small minded, I came out [of high school] and I got a lot of experience. I really think that you learn more from experience than you do by learning about facts from school. You know, every experience gives you a new learning opportunity. I think that a lot of people don't have that yet, and it's understandable, they won't until they experience it. So I have a different experience that I bring to the table that they're not familiar with, so it definitely- it definitely drives a wedge between me and my fellow classmates, but I think they learn a lot from me, as well as I learn a lot from them. I left for the military right after high school, so- you know- it's been five years since I've been in school. A lot has changed. I mean, socially- when I was in high school Facebook just started. (Laughs)

MK: What??? Wow.

JB: So it wasn't really big yet. It was big, but not to the point where people were on their phones running in to you like they are now. I mean, it's definitely different. I have a different way of talking to people, socially, I tend to stay off my phone when I'm in conversations. You know, honestly, it does disconnect people. It really does. I think that's mostly where the disconnect comes from is my fellow students all have their technology, and the human interaction is just not there. With the people that I grew up with, it is. It was just different. Not to say that it's completely bad, but it's different and it does drive a wedge between you.

MK: Let's see. Do you notice any difference in who you are from before you enlisted in the military?

JB: Oh my gosh (laughs) I don't even think I can describe the difference between my high school self and myself now. Besides the fact that I'm married- we also had a little girl after I got back from deployment so I have three children. So I'm married and have 3 children, that's the biggest change, (laughs) so it's pretty drastic, and um...

MK: OK, could you repeat that? (I didn't hear what he said because I had to get up and let Professor Darien back in room)

JB: Yeah. Besides the fact from being married and having children, which I think is just a major life change.

MK: Yeah.

JB: Everything changes when you have babies. I mean, besides that fact, I know what I want to do, I feel like I have a purpose now, where as in high school I had no idea what I was going to do, I was kind of carefree, kind of just went about my day to day business, you know just kind of chilled and relaxed. It starts to get serious when you come out of the military, and when you join the military. Shit gets real, real quick. I think that's the biggest change. I am a completely different person. I don't even know that person that I was in high school. I really don't.

MK: Wow. So how do you juggle student life and family life because I noticed you have twin 3 year olds and you have a-

JB: Yes, twin 3 year olds and a one year old daughter.

MK: How do you do it?

JB: Honestly I leave it here. I try to leave it here as much as possible. So I cram it all in, I really pay attention in all my courses. When my professor is speaking I really gotta buckle down and just focus. Every class I just gotta tell myself 'It's almost over, just listen.' I take a lot of notes while I'm in class, and I get like an hour break so I use that time to write papers, study. I mean I've tried to study while my kids are awake, sometimes I'm able to, sometimes they're off doing their own thing, but sometimes they're scribbling on your notebook with your pen and stuff. You really have to find a balance, find a schedule that works, so if I have something to do that I can't have them around for I wait till they go to bed. If I can't get it done in school-just gotta do it. You just gotta do it. I can't fail now (laughs) so you gotta do it. I don't think you can balance it, I think you just have to do it. So you find ways to do that.

MK: OK. There's been a lot of debate on the role the VA plays, what's your opinion on the VA healthcare system?

JB: Oh. The VA healthcare system. (Pause) I don't want to say that I feel like I'm entitled to healthcare- I am. I really do feel that I am. Anyone who is deployed or serves in the military I think should. I think it's kind of- (pause) it's definitely a broken system. I mean my wife served in the military- she doesn't get veteran healthcare. And she served in the military just as much as I did. She was taking care of my family when I couldn't be. I would almost rather you give my family healthcare than me just because I think that would really help these veterans getting out with families. Now they gotta get out and find healthcare for their families, and it's just so- it's tough. It really is. Especially when you're coming out and you don't have a job. So you want to go to school and use your benefits they give you, you gotta find ways to make that work. You gotta find ways to get healthcare for your family on a pretty limited income. I really- I feel like it's broken. You know do I get the care that I need- yeah most of the time if I've got something going on. I think, I think they're should be more. I think dental should be included, honestly. I think they should cover everything. We risk our lives for this country. We come back and you know they give us a lot, but if you start to get down into the individual circumstances, there's really not much leeway. So it's kinda you did this, you did this, for this much time, here you go. That's it. That's all you get. Nothing else. There's nothing else. There's no individual care for you. I don't know. I think it needs to be fixed, I think it needs to be looked at, I think it needs to be redone. You know I think there's good parts and bad parts. I think there's a lot of bad parts for a lot of bad people- well not bad people but different people that have different circumstances. So I think they need to focus on- you know and get some leeway for those individual circumstances. I think that's the biggest change that needs to be happening. The way I feel about it is that it's broken and needs to be fixed. It needs to be looked at more.

MK: OK. If you could do it all over again, would you?

JB: Absolutely. Best decision I've ever made hands down. It set me up- I've got college paid for, I don't need to work a job and go to college, you know, which is great. I met my wife in the military, we had children while I was in the military. I couldn't see my life going any differently, and I wouldn't want it to. Everything's worked out for me. I found god in the military,

everything just changed for me. And all for the better. I own a house now and I'm 23 years old. Can't beat it. I've got my college paid for- can't beat it. I've got a beautiful family, and you can't beat it. I would not change it for the world.

MK: That's good. Would you support your children enlisting in the military?

JB: (pause) I don't know. I don't know how I feel about that. I'm not there yet, thank god.

MK: Yeah, you've got a while!

JB: Yeah. I would encourage them to see what's out there first. Really focus and maybe shadow while you're in high school. See what kinds of jobs and occupations you want to get in to- you know the military is helpful in a lot of ways, and I want to be that support system for my kids. I don't want them to feel like they have to join the military because they don't have another option. I mean I had other options, but you're coming out of high school, you're in debt, nothing to show, nothing really going for you. You get to college and you see all the time that kids just party. They skip school. I'm not dealing with that now because the military made me grow up a lot. I honestly don't- I want to be that support system for my children but if they ultimately did make that decision I would definitely respect it and support them in any way I could.

MK: If there was one thing you wanted the general public to know about the military or about veterans, what would it be?

JB: A lot of veterans are at a different point in their life than most people. Lend them an ear. Talk to them every now and again. You never know what you could do for that person. You don't know what they've been through. I remember being at the campus center one time and I saw a veteran walk in with a service dog. Somebody I overheard, they said 'doesn't look like they're disabled to me,' and I said you have no idea. I said you have no idea what they've seen, what they've heard, what they've had to do. But I really think that you shouldn't judge them. You should really listen to them. Talk to them, take them seriously. Don't just pass them by and make comments like that. I really feel like in order to understand veterans you need to talk to them, don't just assume, or be judgmental right off the bat. Talk to a veteran. You know, really see where they're coming from.

MK: Do you hear comments like that a lot? Just when you're on campus?

JB: Honestly, that was like the only time I've ever heard it. I was really shocked- I was just like 'wow,' you know where do you, where do you get the right to say that to someone? Or behind they're back. I don't hear a lot of it. I really don't. But I hear silence. I don't hear people talking to their veterans, you know and I think they kind of seem like 'maybe he's fucked up from the war,' excuse my language, you know, nobody wants to deal with that, but they have to. Talk to them. That's all I would say. But as far as comments, I don't really hear that many, but it's also bad that I don't hear much positivity either.

MK: Well, that was my last question, but if you have anything else you want to share, go for it.

JB: I don't. That's pretty much it I think. I think that's it.

MK: OK.