



## Grace In The Wilderness

### **Scott Riley, Author, *Grace in the Wilderness***

From the front lines of the Vietnam War to the drug-laden streets of New York City, Scott Riley's life has been an odyssey of epic proportion, marked by loss, heartbreak, courage, and survival. In his honest and riveting memoir, *Grace in the Wilderness*, Scott Riley vividly describes his 30 years in the trenches battling heroin and himself, and how ultimately, shepherded by the love of his twin daughters, he was able to seek the help he needed to not only overcome his lifelong drug addiction, but to inspire others with his story of redemption.

Today, Scott is working to increase the success rate of substance abuse rehabilitations programs as an advocate for veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Scott was born in 1945 to a black, middleclass Christian family in Mamaroneck, New York. His parents' only child, Scott spent much of his childhood and adolescence devouring the great literary works of Kipling, Hesse, and Wright—his imagination fueled with the monolithic imagery that jumped from the pages.

In 1965, while attending the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan, Scott was commissioned by Otis Elevator to render top-secret technical drawings for United States government military contractors.

Just a year later, in 1966, Scott's trajectory would take an irrevocable turn when he was drafted to serve in the Vietnam War. Initially stationed as an Honor Guard at Arlington National Cemetery, Scott began his overseas tour in Vietnam in 1967 as part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry Division. Over the next two years, Scott's life would become a myriad of violence, surviving bloody combat missions, landmine explosions, and the heartbreaking loss of countless comrades. In 1968, six months after receiving a Purple Heart, Scott went AWOL.

While on the run in Qui Nhon, Scott met and fell in love with a Cambodian mamasan; together they would find themselves entwined in Vietnam's black market, dealing drugs, guns, and anything else that would reap a profit. Without his uniform, Scott was untouchable; a black American, no longer considered an enemy of Vietnam, he was able to make quick connections with supply people, loaders, drivers, and dockworkers along the South China Sea's deep-water port city. Now an addict himself, Scott became a key player in the rise of No. 4 heroin on the brink of its explosion throughout Southeast Asia.

With no intention of ever returning to his homeland, Scott and his lover planned to expand their empire further into the soft underbelly of Asia's drug trade. But before those wheels could be set in motion—after 10 months on the run—Scott was apprehended by the American government and sent back to the States.

Scott returned to New York at the height of the country's most notorious drug era; the Vietnam War was nearly over, and heroin flooded the streets and back alleys as wounded veterans returned from battle with raging new addictions.

Late in 1968, Scott met his wife Barbara and fathered twin daughters, Libra and Hasha. His days of being a functioning addict were short lived, and soon the charade gave way to a darker, lonelier path. For the next 30 years, estranged from his family and society, the pendulum of Scott's lifestyle would swing from drug lord to homeless criminal.

In December 1995, Scott Riley, homeless and with nowhere else to turn, checked himself into Su Casa, a methadone-to-abstinence treatment center on Manhattan's Lower East Side—his first major step toward recovery. Intensive one-on-one therapy revealed that Scott had been suffering from war-induced Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a potent precursor to Scott's subsequent drug addiction. Healing was a raw and revealing process, a purging of emotions and memories that had haunted Scott since the war. But like angels waiting in the wings, his twin daughters supported him with their unconditional love every step of the way.

Scott Riley has been clean and sober since September 1996. Following his graduation from the recovery program, Scott enrolled in the French Culinary Institute in Manhattan, and soon thereafter returned to Su Casa—this time, as a chef. Today, at the helm of the center's kitchen, Scott's very presence sends a clear message of hope, resilience, and compassion to those struggling to find their way.