Invictus Games Radio Podcast: Episode Two- Joel Guindon

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PJ: Welcome to Invictus Games radio. I'm PJ Kwong. The Invictus Games Toronto 2017 take place Septemer 23rd to 30th and will harness the power of sport to inspire the recovery of wounded, ill and injured servicemen and women. This podcast shines a light on the stories of those competing in the games those surrounding them. Their spirit unconquered.

PJ: On this episode an archery medalist from the Invictus Games Orlando 2016 Canadian team. He's a retired corporal who served with the Canadian army and who suffered physical injuries like a herniated disc as well as PTSI or post traumatic stress injury as a result of his service. In this podcast, we're going to find out how activity helped him in his recovery. I am ***delighted*** to be talking to Joel Guindon. How 'bout that?

Joel Guindon: Hi PJ

PJ: Hi there. I did it.

Joel Guindon: Yeah you did. Really good, really good. Thank you for having me. It's very nice to be here.

PJ: Well it's wonderful to have you. So I wanted you to take me back to little Joel; when and why and how did you decide to join the military?

Joel Guindon: Uh, wow, that's a big question. I decided to join the military back in 1998. I was considered to be of the older generation at the time I joined and it's something I've always wanted to do...

PJ: Now what does that mean, older generation?

Joel Guindon: I was 28 at the time.

PJ: OK so you'd already been out in the world for a little bit.

Joel Guindon: Yes I had experience so I went to school, worked full time... I had experience as a 'working civilian' so to speak, compared to the people I was with when I joined the military, they were a lot younger, I was the oldest in my group, in my platoon. One of my cousins was active, and still is by the way, and so I had followed everything. I've watched thousands of documentaries about it and I was extremely patriotic. You know…

PJ: From the time you were a child?

Joel Guindon: Yeah, yeah.

PJ: Ok.

Joel Guindon: I've always considered myself a Canadian you know I look at the flag, I understood at a young age what it meant and what it represents, what our country is, how our country is viewed by the international community and you know as I grew older, I said, you know, it's it's now or never. I have to have to I have to sign up and do my part and… That's the way I felt. So I joined and I wanted to serve overseas, I had tremendous amount of respect for people who went and actually participated in the combat part of the past conflicts and my goal was to reach a reconnaissance platoon, I want to be a reconnaissance patrolman.

PJ: Now what does that mean just people who don't know?

Joel Guindon: A reconnaissance patrolmen basically is… It's a small group of men that are self-sustained. They are usually dropped behind enemy lines. They go and perform surveillance on whatever target it is. Might be a building a group of people and they gather information, bring the information back to command and help them decide if there's need to be action taken upon that target that they surveilled. So it's not very… They're not very, they're not part of the actual combat, they participated in once it starts, but the more they're, terms of surveillance, they can participate once the decisions take to take action upon the surveillance intelligence gathered and what they're also the last ones out once the attack is done and once the actions are completed, they stay there and they perform surveillance to see what else is going.

PJ: To make sure it's completed?

Joel Guindon: Yeah exactly.

PJ: I've always wondered when you're working with a group of people, does everybody see the same things? So when you come back to whoever to whom you have to you know send the give the information, does everybody have the same perception, same point of view? Like do you operate as a group in that way as well as? Or does it depend where you each are physically?

Joel Guindon: No I think we all see the same thing and I mean we have you know when we go overseas, I've performed two missions, one in Bosnia and one in Afghanistan, and one thing I notice is, before we go out of whatever it is, the mission that

we're tasked to do, whether it would be humanitarian aid or protecting somebody, a high-ranking general, we're fed the information we need to perform the job and when we're out there, we're all trained to look for the same things, to do same things, because I have to know my partner's job, by the guy next to him.

PJ: OK.

Joel Guindon: The guy next to him and so on, so that if one should happen to fall during the mission, I'm able to perform his duties also.

PJ: I see.

Joel Guindon: So I might be tasked with duty A while my, my brother is tasked with duty B, but I know what his duty B is so, if he falls I can perform both.

PJ: And do you think that this kind of close work, this is what creates that bond that they talk about in military service? The fact that you guys have to work, men and women obviously I just uses the term guys just generically but, the fact that you are in a situation together that creates that bond, it seems to me.

Joel Guindon: It's a part of it. It's part of the equation, but I think what creates the biggest bond is that… Every where I went, no matter who I was working with, whether it be... I mean that the bond transcends into other military units. When I worked with the Brits, the French, the Americans, you know, and that's what I basically… The comradery, one is that, if you fall you know they won't leave you there. No matter what happens, they will not leave you there. So you know you could put your life in their hands and you know, you believe in the fact that they can put their lives in your hands. I will do whatever it takes to protect my brother because I know he will do everything it takes to protect me. So that we all come back and succeed in the mission we're given. So that feeling, knowing that no matter what happens, you will not be abandoned is, is, in my opinion, what has built such a strong and to this day, an unbreakable bond. You know, I'm a veteran. I'm out of the military, but the guys I served with, I don't care if they call me at 2 a.m. or 2 p.m. when they need help. I'm picking up. If I need to be there, I'm driving up there. Now I've been put in situations where, last couple months were there's been suicide attempts. You know, I make myself available, for talk, for… Whether if they can, they need to talk directly and see my face. We'll use Skype, because, really we live at a five hour drive. If I need to be there, I will drive out there. That bond transcends everything. It's it's unbelievable and you spoke about that bond, and I'll tell you a story that better explains the bond. When I was in Orlando, I wanted to be…

PJ: For the 2016 Games?

Joel Guindon: Yes for the 2016 Games, sorry 'bout that, I didn't mention that.
When I was in Orlando, I had asked if I could if I could speak, if I could have a moment, 30 seconds, to have a talk with the Prince Harry. And just because I wanted to convey my thanks for what he'sdoing and… I wasn't sure, yeah we'll try to make it happen. But it was hard, because he obviously his agenda is a lot more packed than mine. But I was walking on the on the Invictus site and I saw him talk to a group of people and there weren't any journalists around, there weren't any cameras, right so it looked like it was a just him having a moment. So I said you know what, I'll interrupt him and I'll go and talk to him, because despite the fact that he has a title of prince, he fought in Afghanistan. So to me and other people, he's part of the band of brothers slash sisters. You know we're all part of this group and I had to thank him personally. Like I thank people for their service. I thank the brothers I've served with, I have to thank you for what he's doing with the Invictus Games. So I went up to him and I went against protocol, you're not supposed to to touch him until he reaches his hand out to shake yours. I put my hand on his back and said, "Excuse me sir, can I interrupt you for a second?" Obviously the security. They all came in and they got closer to us, but he signaled to them, everything was fine and he said, "Sure what what can I do for you?" I said that, "I'd like a word with you in private if you don't mind." So he said, "Sure. Let's do that." I said, "I respect your title of prince, but right now, I'd like to thank you as a brother. As a band of brother, brother in arms. I really appreciate the fact that you put together the Invictus Games, because they've done so much for me in terms of recovery and bringing me back to the person I was before I got diagnosed with post traumatic stress injury. And you know it was a genuine conversation and it was based on the fact that both of us fought for the same cause. I know for a fact that if I were on that line that they… On a specific day and he was there, he would have this on the same for me as I would have done for him.

PJ: Yes.

Joel Guindon: As I would have done for anybody else there. So that that comradery transcends international borders, social status. Whatever. You know it's it's very hard to explain, very hard to conceive. But every person I served with, I consider them as much part of my family as my sons, my wife, my parents, my sister, you know, we're that close. You know…

PJ: You know we talk about the fact that you had a herniated disk, which is no joke. And then you have post traumatic stress injury diagnosis with each of these.

What is the difference in coming to terms with a physical injury versus an invisible wound?

Joel Guindon: I think that, you know what, the physical injury is serving in the military you're you're kind of… You're you're taught to ignore the pain and continue. I find that

with the physical injury, where you actually feel an actual pain, obviously that's just my, my perception of it. I feel the pain of my lower back. I've also been diagnosed with a degenerative disc disease because of the service. So I feel that pain but I don't... It's not something that actually I lose sleep over now and I've learned to accept that very easily because you know the physical work and what I did was extremely demanding and I knew when I started that eventually my body would…

PJ: Say no.

Joel Guindon: … I would suffer. It would come to that. But the psychological injury, and I'm not proud to say that, but that's really I think it's important that we say that. At first when I was first introduced when the military, the possibility of, at the time what they called post-traumatic stress disorder, of getting that, my automatic reaction was, well it's not going to happen to me.

PJ: Sure.

Joel Guindon: I'm a soldier I'm you know… it's not going to happen to me.

PJ: I'm a tough guy.

Joel Guindon: Yeah exactly. You adopt that macho way of thinking, which is, to a certain extent normal, because of where I was, infantry. Infantry you're, you're taught to be tough. You're taught to be a machine and PTSD is the is not going to happen. You know, I remember we were sitting in, in a big room before we were about to leave for, for Bosnia first tour of 2002 and a gentleman was there specifically to talk about post traumatic stress disorder. And he got up on stage and he said "I was in the Bosnia '93 and…"

PJ: So he's a soldier talking about it?

Joel Guindon: He was a veteran and retired, but he really he retired because of stress disorder. And he was commenting on the symptoms and signs of it and I remember and obviously it's the truth and tell it because it has to be told, because that's the that mentality we had. When we were sitting and listening to him, to me, everything was saying was like, "that's impossible." How can somebody be affected like that? I mean there's no physical injury how…

PJ: You look like a normal person, walking around.

Joel Guindon: Yeah, exactly. So you know some people made jokes. I made jokes. I regret having done that today because I discovered that you know what, it's a lot more serious than it is. You know, there's no excuses for the way I reacted. But I

wasn't… I was misinformed. I was not educated about it. Obviously I, I wasn't suffering from, from it before.

PJ: And you know what you need to not beat yourself up, because now when you know better, you do better. You didn't know, at the time.

Joel Guindon: Yeah I don't beat myself up for it.

PJ: Good.

Joel Guindon: But at the same time, when I look at all that and see where I am today, I find it's a lot harder to deal with operational stress injuries because that mentality, is still alive in the military and out of the military in the civilian world and I don't need to be to talk about the military. It's a been a while but there are two separate things.

PJ: Well it's continued to evolve because up until very recently people couldn't really appreciate or accept the fact that there were invisible wounds. They just thought well you're covered. You don't have scars, you're fine.

Joel Guindon: Agreed.

PJ: So it's taking people a certain amount of time to understand that this is actually a real problem.

Joel Guindon: Yes it is. It's actually a very real problem and but I mean obviously it… I've noticed that there's a lot of progress. There's been a lot of progress and you know... You know events like the Invictus Games. Organizations like a True Patriot Love, Soldier On, Wounded Warrior, I mean they help a lot in in not only helping those that suffer with it, with OSI's and and physical injuries, but also with building awareness about mental illness and how it's not, it doesn't destroy a person. It's an injury. You can overcome it. You know and they help you realize that and society's seeing that people who've been disabled, they're coming back from the disability or their injury and actually leave leading productive lives

again. So the work, I mean there's there's, there's obviously some progression but there's still there's still work to be done.

PJ: Of course. Of course.

Joel Guindon: That stigma's still alive.

PJ: So tell me a little bit about when you didn't quite realize that you were suffering from PTSI, if somebody is listening to this today, what kind of symptoms were you exhibiting that finally made you realize that there was something going on?

Joel Guindon: Well…

PJ: And are you back in Canada at this point?

Joel Guindon: Yes I was back in Canada. While I was overseas, Nothing hit me over there. No matter what the situation, no matter how stressful, no matter how ugly the scene was, no matter horrific it was, I always managed to do my job and I managed to really numb myself out. My emotions were non-existent. So whether, you know, the general we were protecting commended me on it; said, "One of the things I really appreciate about you, is the fact that no matter where we are, no matter how stressful or horrific it is, you're always calm. You always make the right decisions." And he said that it gave him confidence. So when we got out somewhere, he looked at me and those were his words: I looked at you and I saw how calm you are, and it made me feel comfortable. So…

PJ: You did your job.

Joel Guindon: When I reflect on that I think, well I can have signs and symptoms when I was there. A month after I came back, when I noticed there was something wrong, it was because I had been back a month, but the rage, the anger that comes with, with war zones and sounds bad to say, but you need to survive. The rage, the anger, the adrenaline rush, the hyper state of vigilance. The controlled fear. We're still there.

PJ: You were feeling controlled fear? You were feeling controlled fear?

Joel Guindon: Yeah. I was always, there was always fear present everywhere I went.

PJ: OK.

Joel Guindon: Just that I was able to control that fear and use it to my advantage. You know, a fear in a certain extent. sort of heightens your senses.

PJ: Yes. OK.

Joel Guindon: If you control. If you don't let the fear control you. But that fear started to become uncontrollable start to get the best of me. I associated certain events with either smells or sights, feelings, sounds. And that fear got controlled by

that association and sort of started developing it and then the nightmares came. Panic attacks. I had panic attacks, day or night.

PJ: Yep.

Joel Guindon: Since the Games, I don't have panic attacks during the day.

PJ: That's wonderful.

Joel Guindon: Yes, perfect. So I have them at night when I wake up, I wake up from a nightmare right into a panic attack. I'm unable to, to, to digest those emotions enough to say, “Well, OK, well I'm having a panic attack.” You know its, it happens. It just goes full fledge and that's what I'm working on right now with my psychologist. But, so after a month I came back. That's when I realized that there was an issue. There was an issue.

PJ: You talk about being a husband and a father.

Joel Guindon: Yes.

PJ: And you've got this family and you're trying to sort of build your life in Canada again. You're trying to sort of reconcile what's happened to you with what you're experiencing at that time. How long did it take for you to get to a point where you wanted to start doing activity? What... Because you talked about it once in a where I sort of heard you were being kicked dragging and screaming sort of out of the basement. So tell me about that that moment and that time.

Joel Guindon: Took ten years.

PJ: Ten years.

Joel Guindon: Yes ten years after I was diagnosed.

PJ: Oh my goodness.

Joel Guindon: Yes. When I was diagnosed, I think things started to go downhill because I was originally I was that of a guy who never quit. I wasn't a fastest, the strongest in the military, but one thing is that I never quit.

PJ: Yeah.

Joel Guindon: I never said, you know what I quit get me out here. No matter how hard or how rough or things were, my reconnaissance course was one of the hardest things I've done in my life and I never said I quit, I completed it. You know, so…

PJ: Never say die.

Joel Guindon: Exactly.

PJ: Yeah.

Joel Guindon: Exactly. So when that hit me. I started quitting certain things. Basically quitting I myself. You know, stop fighting and start and searching for something that would help me… avoid any triggers. And…

PJ: So when you're talking about a smell or a sound, if you think you're going to hear that sound, you avoid that place is that it?

Joel Guindon: Exactly. Exactly. So I went down hill. It got to a point where I had to choose. I chose what I call a… what I call a quote drug unquote. I chose my drug of choice my drug of choice was not the actual drugs or alcohol or gambling or pornography, my drug of choice was Netflix.

PJ: Netflix. Wow

Joel Guindon: Yeah, yeah. I mean I chose Netflix because I got out of bed, lied down on the sofa. I was by myself. Nobody there. I was watching Netflix, all I concentrated on was what I was watching. So I didn't hear any other sounds. No screaming, no, no vibrations in the ground. Nothing. I was in an environment where I could, to my thought, that I could control it.

PJ: Sure.

Joel Guindon: I wasn't exposed to anything.

PJ: You can also control what you are watching.

Joel Guindon: Exactly.

PJ: Which you can't do on television.

Joel Guindon: I had control of everything. So I became a hermit. I... Isolated myself from My family. My wife, two kids. My, my, my parents, my sister, my friends. Social activities. Everything. I completely isolated myself. I lied about everything to everyone when I got invited. I would say yes, but when the event came up, I'd say, you know what, I'd find a reason, I'd lie and obviously people listening to this will find out for the first time. I'm sorry, but it is what it is. So I lied about everything you know, I totally isolated myself. I, I didn't eat well, I didn't take care of myself in the sense that, I was letting myself slowly die, if I can say that. You know, I never contemplated suicide.

PJ: No no.

Joel Guindon: Because I was... I was comfortable… Where I was because I wasn't experiencing anything bad because I had I wasn't… Well I could control.

PJ: Did you feel as if, you know, this whole thing with Netflix, this whole thing, that if you told the truth… What did you fear would happen, if you told people the truth, of what was going on?

Joel Guindon: Well…

PJ: Like you were going to the family reunion and you made up an excuse. You know that kind of a lie. You know, what did you fear about the truth?

Joel Guindon: Well my fear wasn't based on what I thought could happen. Something happened to me that created that fear. The question you asked before about the one that I first discover. When I first discovered I had that issue, I was still serving. I had just got back from Afghanistan, about a month, and I went to see my command, one of my commanding officers, and I said, "Can I have a word with you in private, sir?" I was with the… With reconnaissance, so we deal directly with, with command, we're not… We're higher up in the in the chain of command. You know, we deal directly with them so, I went to see him and said, "Can I talk with you privately?" He said, "Yes." And obviously I don't want people to think that, everybody military is like that. That was a specific situation with a specific person, right. I said, "Listen, I need to speak with you in private." So we went to his office. That was on a Friday morning and the reason why I remember it's Friday morning, you'll find out. I said, "Listen I have a problem. I can't sleep. I'm having nightmares. I'm constantly, constantly enraged. I, I'm having flashbacks. I'm constantly high on adrenaline. I can't sleep. So there's

something wrong. I need help. What can I do?" And his answer was, "OK, you take the rest of the afternoon off. Take the weekend off. Think about everything you just talked to me about it when you come back on Monday, that better be gone. Is that clear?"

PJ: Or if it was only that easy, eh.

Joel Guindon: Yes I said at that point, I, I convinced myself, you know what, I need to shut up and suffer in silence.

PJ: OK.

Joel Guindon: So I lost confidence in other people. I lost confidence and everybody so…

That's when I just said, you know what? I'm not going to talk about this. A year and a half later, I went to somebody else in the military and his answer was… I said the same things, that was my second attempt. His answer was, "All right. That's OK. But here's what's going to happen: in six months if you're not better, we're going to fill a paperwork to kick you out of the forces."

PJ: Oh boy. Yeah.

Joel Guindon: So you know you, don't want to be kicked out of the forces, you see that as your family, you know? And they've always told you, whatever happens, we'll be there for you. But something happened and both times the impression I got is that... My family wasn't there for me. So might as well shut up and enjoy this. So I just went… That second time, it went down hill. I came into work one morning in... I dropped my gear on the counter and said to my boss, "You know what, I'm going to medical and I'm done. This is it. I can't do this job anymore." So I went there and that's when…

PJ: That's an act of courage by the way.

Joel Guindon: Well thank you. Thank you. But that's when you know, that the whole, the whole, medical aspect of it started where they diagnosed me with post traumatic stress injury.

PJ: So tell me you're the first person that I ever heard of refer to as post traumatic stress injury. I like it by the way.

Joel Guindon: Thank you.

PJ: Tell me the difference for you between post traumatic stress injury and the term that used to be used which is post traumatic stress disorder. What did those two terms mean to you?

Joel Guindon: Well… When I first was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder, it was a term that was closely associated with a lot of stigma. Being in the military infantry, all the machoism of… You know you're the tough guy, you're the soldier, you're the, you're the, you're the machine, as soon as you heard the word PTSD. I mean the acronym PTSD or mental problems, it was stigmatized. You were seen, as you were branded as, actually branded they call that N.S.: non-serviceable.

PJ: Oh really.

Joel Guindon: They would say, oh that person's NS, is non-serviceable. So in the military, when you're non, something is non-serviceable and means that you can't use it anymore. If it's a tool that you need like a rifle you need to... You need to as your main tool in conflict zones and missions, if it's not serviceable, you can't bring it because it can't protect you. It'll make it fail the mission. So when they brag that a person has non-serviceable, obviously you were seen as…

PJ: Useless.

Joel Guindon: Useless. Yeah. Yeah, yeah that's a perfect or perfect term. So when I think about PTSD, it's closely associated with that stigma and that feeling. When I got diagnosed with it, obviously I started reading about it and wanted to know more about what was PTSD, at the time, and discovered in my research that there's a lot of scientific research that supports the fact that it's not a disorder. It's an injury. And when they heard the word injury, I got this feeling that you know.. I can get better. It's an injury. It's not a disorder. I'm not born with this. It comes from being exposed to high levels of threat. And stress for the extremely sustained time. For seven, seven or eight months of constant stress and threat and horror scenes and… Participating in it and attacks. You think about those and… You say, well you know what, I was fine before there's no way this is a disorder. This is an injury. I can get better. I can work through this and the games have helped me dive into the research and, and when I talk to my friends and I use the word injury, I find that they're more inclined to talk about what they have. Cause they see it, you know it's not a disorder… Some people say why do you call it an injury, it's called PTSD. So while it used to be called PTSD, it used to be called shell shock.

PJ: Yes.

Joel Guindon: You know… Times change, research moves forward, you know. Science moves forward and we… We're discovering these things and if you look at operate, the word operational stress injury, which I think PTSI is slowly going to…

PJ: Yes

Joel Guindon: Coining the term OSI, I find that it's a lot easier for me to tell people, well I have operational stress injury. People seem to be, when you use the word injury, they seem to be open to willing… And willing to talk about and to discuss it, to.. Without being judgemental. When you mention to people I have post traumatic stress disorder, automatically, they think, OK a well… This guy might, just person might be dangerous.

PJ: Or defective.

Joel Guindon: Or defective. Exactly. And they don't really see you as making it. Look, I mean, coming back from that injury. So when I use the word injury, for me there's a lot of relief that comes with that there's the knowing that this is temporary. It's not as bad as the limits I've set myself because of this injury. There's more to, to life after being diagnosed with that. It might be, you know what parts of it might, might stay with me for the rest of my life, but I know that it's an injury because since I've completed the games, a lot of things have changed positively. My recovery process has greatly moved forward. So it is an injury. It's not a disorder.

PJ: Tell me exactly what participating in the Invictus Games Orlando 2016, how did that change you?

Joel Guindon: Wow. We can sit here and talk about that all day. To keep it short and simple, before the Games, I was numb. To everything.

PJ: Even though you were training and you're on the team? Still in that time frame?

Joel Guindon: Oh yeah.

PJ: Ok.

Joel Guindon: Yeah, I was either numb or mad, and you can ask Joe Carollo, who was part of the administrative for Soldier On. A couple times… I was, I was rude to Joe and I apologized for it and he accepted and he said, "I understand, I understand."

Because I was put under a lot of stress and obviously I responded to that by being, being rude to, to, to certain situations.

PJ: You felt agitated.

Joel Guindon: Yes and I took it out on, on other people. So now I'm more… I've got more in tune with my emotions. You know. I'm able to laugh. I've cried in some situations, where I wasn't able to do that before, you know. When you're either extremely happy about... About certain things or like my when my sons were, were born. I had no emotions. None whatsoever. I wasn't happy. I wasn't sad. I wasn't crying out of joy. I was just numb about it. You know and… Since the Games, you know, my sons made me cry of because of their enthusiasm to certain things, like karate, Jake learning to walk, Jake learning to talk… He is my youngest one. So all of these things are new to me. When I look back at that the pictures of my son learning to walk in the video, now I laugh. You know, I've cried and I can't believe it because I look at his I can't believe I was in numb throughout those, those situations. I've learned to understand what triggers me. I've learned to understand what I've associated in civilian life today with horrific scenes or conflict scenes back of my service, either in Afghanistan or Bosnia. I've

learned to, to separate myself from that association I've done with those or better understand how PTSI affects me. One of my main things during the day, because I don't panic attacks anymore, is if I get in a situation that triggers me when I breathe, I smell the odours that are associatedwith horrific scenes.

PJ: The old smells.

Joel Guindon: Yes. Blood, charred skin, the sand, the air in Afghanistan, like 30% of what you breathe in Afghanistan is fecal matter.

PJ: Wow.

Joel Guindon: You can actually smell the fecal matter in the air. So I'll be, I'll be, I'll be in a room somewhere with air conditioning, where they just cleaned up the room and something happens, I'm triggered. I know I'm in the room. I'm not having flashbacks. But the air I breath smells exactly like it was in Afghanistan. So that's how strong OSIs are. When they, they're extremely strong, the brain is unbelievable how it can get affected. You know. So I've learned myself, I've learned to distance myself from, from those and better understand that I'm more active as, as a person, you know. I'm not on the sofa anymore, I participate in different social activities. I still have trouble participating in them, but I face them and I expose myself to these triggers. Some of them have not subsided, some have. Not enough to say I can function normally. I mean, there's

always, everything's always a challenge. I can't say I really enjoy it. I enjoy my, my time, because I know it's a challenge, but it's something I must do and I'm not going to quit. I keep exposing myself constantly to these, to these events and go through the triggers and it's not always comfortable. But I've noticed that in the, in the time that first started the Invictus Games process to this day, I've progressed so much that it has to happen. I have to continue. You know I can't settle... I can't settle where I am right now, although I'm happy where I am.

PJ: Yes.

Joel Guindon: My wife and my kids noticed a huge difference. You know my, my youngest one… I connected with my youngest one at the Games. For the first time.

PJ: Wow.

Joel Guindon: And I hadn't connected with them before and that was extremely…

PJ: What was that moment?

Joel Guindon: When he came on stage with me. He came on stage with me when I got the medal. I asked my wife, my two kids come on stage with me to take a picture on stage with the medal on my bow and my son Liam leaned up against me and I actually felt them for the first time. I was aware of the contact. You know it's like... All the walls that I had built because of PTSI… I mean, many of them have fallen and what, that was one of the walls that had fallen.

PJ: That is a remarkable moment.

Joel Guindon: Yeah, its unbelievable. Unbelievable.

PJ: To ordinary people that are listening to this podcast, is there something that they can do, to first of all, respect the boundaries for somebody who's struggling with PTSI, but also to maybe, in some way, show support or help? Is there a way that you would like to share with people so that they know what to do?

Joel Guindon: You know… I think the important thing is to, to have an open mind. I think the Canadian society has demonstrated thoughout the years that it's very open to, to a lot of change. And I think that it's something that we could put into

recognizing mental illness and I'll tell you a story of where somebody was there for me, and that brought a very positive change and my life. Somebody who, I think, noticed that I was having difficulty. Because of PTSI I was going through... Not a panic attack but, I had been triggered.

PJ: To a moment of discomfort to say the least.

Joel Guindon: Yeah exactly, exactly. That's very well said. I was in… In Orlando at the Invictus Games and… Our team was participating in the swimming medal event. It was one of the last events. It was extremely hot.

PJ: And where you competing, Joel?

Joel Guindon: No I was not competing. No. I was sitting in it. I was in the stands and those were… The stands were structured… Structured stands when people move or jump..

PJ: Like bleachers?

Joel Guindon: Bleachers, exactly. The bleachers would move physically, you know, they would vibrate when people would jump.

PJ: Sure.

Joel Guindon: So there were people screaming there, were to get kids screaming. There were… You could physically see the injuries of the people… Were lost limbs… All of these things were for me, triggers. The heat. I had just ran out of water. I was surrounded by people in the middle of the crowd and... Everything there was a trigger.

PJ: And the bleachers were shaking.

Joel Guindon: The bleachers were shaking so that gave the effect of a, of an explosion. You know. For me, that's not my perception of the of that feeling and that's what my brain associated feeling with. And so I said… Normally I would just leave and go home, you know, I said, I can't leave, I can't go home, but I, I realize I couldn't digest these emotions I can't process these emotions. So I said, I'll just go off, get off the bleachers, go on the stairs and in a stairwell and breathe a bit, you know, just not leave, still be here, still hear the sounds, still hear the vibrations in the bleachers. But be an environment where I have breathing room. So I went in and staircase and it was sort of a funnel. There was a lot of air, so that made me feel good, you know, and refresh me. It was... It was... It was relaxing. I noticed a volunteer came up to help me. And

they came up to talk to me and she said, “Are you OK?” And I said no… I said, “Yeah yeah. I'm fine. I'm fine.” Because I reverted back to that I can't trust anybody…

PJ: Yeah.

Joel Guindon: And tell them how I feel, so I'm going to suffer in silence. Said, “No, no, I'm fine. I'm fine. I just want to be left alone.” And she said, “You sure you're OK? Because you don't seem fine. Do you need anything?” And that hit me right there, saying well, wait a second here. That's right. I mean I’m at Invictus Games, people judging me. She said, “Can I give get you a bottle of water?” I said, “Yeah, I would love a bottle of water.” So she went away, came back, and gave me the bottle. She said, “Would you like to talk about it?” And again I reverted to that old feeling I said that I just want to be left alone. I don't want to talk about it and her response was, “If you don't mind I'll just stay right here next to you until you feel better.” So I put my head down and said, “OK, sure.” And in my head, I mean, I was going through all these, these, these memories of the times where I looked for help and I was turned down and I stopped believing in people. I stopped believing in myself and now I was in a situation where you know what, right now somebody is trying to help me. I've complete pushed them away. I haven't given them a chance to do so but that person is just staying there. And supporting me without really doing anything. Being present was doing something, but it not engaging in conversation or, or physical contact, putting her hand over my shoulder or whatever. Give me a hug or whatever. None of that. Just being there. To me that specific event… Really helped my recovery process, because it allowed me to gain confidence in people again. And that led me to the ability to, to... Participate in interventions, as this one, going to do interviews, revealing how I felt and how post traumatic stress injury has affected my life. I wouldn’t have done it before because I didn't trust anybody. I thought that I would be judged, be stigmatized, I'd be laughed at… Or considered non-serviceable, if I were to use that expression again.

PJ: Yeah.

Joel Guindon: But that event. You know it showed me that... I can't generalize. I can't put everybody in the same basket. There's people out there to help me and I'll take advantage of that. So if I, to better answer your question, I would say just being there for somebody who you think might be in a… A sort of a crisis of panic attack or whatever, just if… No matter what they say, if they say I don't want to talk to you whatever. If you just stay close, you can keep eye contact with them. That's just that effect, has a calming… Just that, that gesture has a calming effect on, on, anyways on me. You know..

PJ: Well and it's also again, it's another act of courage for you to say, "Yes I would like a bottle of water," because it sounds to me like the old Joel would have said no, no, I'm fine, I'm fine. And in fact that you allowed that little tiny opening to just say, yes. You know that shows huge, huge courage on your part. So that obviously was a life changing moment for you. As you look forward, and before I go there, I just want to say that it sounds to me like you are often ***there***, as you said, for your brothers. You know when they are looking for something, sometimes it's the act of knowing that somebody can call you.

Joel Guindon: Yes.

PJ: That, you know, it's not what you say, it's not what you do. It's the fact that you're available.

Joel Guindon: Yes.

PJ: Do you think that that has made a difference for you, also in your family life now? Being able to just be there, being able to have your child close to you. Do you… does that feel good now.

Joel Guindon: Yes. Beyond a doubt. I think that's one of the greatest feelings, you know, because of… It's not something I have an easy time talking about, but because a PTSI I wasn't able to, to be in the room with my wife when she gave birth to both of our children, you know.

PJ: Too stressful.

Joel Guindon: I was triggered. I was… I remember I went to hospital and that's when I first started having flashbacks I think, like really intense flashbacks. For a moment I was in the hospital but... Sometimes I was out fighting because there were other, other childbirth in the hospital and I remember stepping out of the room and just right before I left the hospital. I'm sitting in the hallway and nurses are coming by with, with, with carts and trays with the placenta in the in, the in the tray. So it's there's a lot of blood. Again get triggered. So I lost the sense of reality of where I was and I was now back in Afghanistan. So when I look at where I am today, obviously the, my relationship with my partner [name omitted] has... Evolved to what I, what, I what I can consider to be a very healthy relationship compared to what it was before. You know in a relationship, the, the aspect of the… The sexual part of it is very important, you know. The intimacy is very important and PTSI affects your libido. And for the longest time I had no interest in intimacy because I was numb. I didn't, I

didn't care for it. I didn't love it. I didn't want. I just was numb. It wasn't important for me. You know and everything's getting back into order. My relationship with my kids, I'm able to connect with them you know, we sit, we laugh, we cuddle. When my kid says he doesn't feel well about something, he's scared or he's tired. Whatever. I can be there for him. You know I can support him. I can… Give him advice. You know the connection is… I've gotten so close with my family. Same with my friends. People I hadn't talked to in a while, I got back in contact with. And they understand, I've explained what happened and they understand. It's like we never stopped talking.

PJ: That's amazing.

Joel Guindon: Yeah.

PJ: So tell me about hiking.

Joel Guindon: Yes.

PJ: Before we turned on the microphone, you were saying that you love activity. You were talking about sport, so tell me about the activities that you love to do.

Joel Guindon: Before I do that, I want to say that you know, the Games, the Invictus Games… They say that sport and activity are extremely good for the recovery process of PTSI and physical injuries you know. And I don't practice specific sports like rowing or sprinting or swimming you know. My main activities I really enjoy are hiking, camping and precision rifle shooting.

PJ: OK

Joel Guindon: I had never shot an arrow before the Invictus Games. Sorry I've shot one when I was nine years old, but other than that... Never in a competitive or with that type of… Of quality of, of gear. And so my sport is hiking, camping and precision shooting firearms and… It's something I really enjoyed doing before I got diagnosed with PTSI. Despite the fact I was in the military infantry and we spent a lot of time in exercises and in rural areas even in my off time, I would go camping. I would go trekking in the woods. I would climb mountains. Whatever it was that was outside in the wilderness, I absolutely loved doing. I stopped doing that until after the Games.

PJ: Oh really.

Joel Guindon: Yeah, when I came back from the Games and people were asking me, so why…

PJ: And this is just May 2016? It's recently.

Joel Guindon: I swear to God PJ, If we met before the Games to do this interview, you would see a totally different person. Entirely different person. What you view physically and both emotionally and be a totally different person. I guarantee. And so since the Games have been done, this is on the done with the Games. 2016. You know, I go for walks in the woods. I've been camping. I go shooting with friends at, at the ranges where I'm a member of and… Just I'm more active and being out trekking in the woods, going for walks… I could go with my, my kids, I bring my kids doing that activity with me and they enjoy it. My wife enjoys it. The dog comes with us, everybody enjoys it. You know, the fresh air. Since I've started doing that again, I feel it has helped me recover. You know, the calming effect of being in the woods, the smell. I don't get triggered in the wilderness, I don't. It's one of the few places where… Camping or anything but despite the fact that we'll do, we'll light a fire at night and, and stand around the fire. The smell of the burning wood or whatever cooking and… I don't get triggered. I don't understand why, but I don't get triggered you know. And the fact that I'm able to participate in those activities, the more and more I find the, the energy to do so. The more I want to do it. So the Games have allowed me not to... Because hiking is not considered a Olympic event of some sorts. They don't…

PJ: Yet.

Joel Guindon: Not yet. ***[Laughs]*** Maybe everyone knows, maybe it'll happen. But hiking for me is my sport, it's my activity. I've done it more in the last five months than I've done in the last 10 years.

PJ: Wow. That's amazing.

Joel Guindon: Yeah because I stopped, I stopped doing everything, you know. I've lost weight and I'm getting healthier. I'm eating better. I'm drinking a lot of water. I cause I quit drinking water, all I was drinking was Pepsi…

PJ: Ah ok, not as good for you.

Joel Guindon: …Because I need the caffeine to, to stay up, to, to to get that rush from the adrenaline, rush that the sugar gives you know. So it's all been positive changes, so when we say about, when we talk about Invictus Games and the benefits of sports and activity. Definitely. There are benefits to it and Invictus Games was the kick in the butt I needed.

PJ: That's amazing. OK Last question.

Joel Guindon: Yes.

PJ: You have been on an unbelievable journey from childhood, all the way through your military service, to today. I would love for you to tell me your favorite three qualities about yourself today.

Joel Guindon: My favorite. OK.

PJ: Besides devilishly handsome. ***[Laughs]***

Joel Guindon: ***[Laughs]*** Oh thank you. Thank you. That wasn't one of them ***[inaudible]***. When I look at myself today… I would say first and foremost, a good father.

PJ: That's a great one.

Joel Guindon: I would say first and foremost I'm a good father. Second I would say I'm a good friend and partner to my wife and my friends and third I would say I'm back at being… My resilience.

PJ: That's amazing.

Joel Guindon: I refuse to quit. I'm back where I was before I got hit with that. You know no matter what I tried, I always refuse to quit. No matter how hard, no matter how many times I was, I was going to be told, you know you're too old to do that, you won't survive that. There's no way you can accomplish that. I made it through everything, you know. I made through everything and I was chosen to do things that people say, "It's never going to happen," and I'm too old. I'm back at that at that stage of my life where, you know, I have that resilience again. I don't, I don't quit.

PJ: You know what the world needs more Joel Guindon. Thank you so much for talking to me.

Joel Guindon: Well thank you for having me. It's been it's been amazing talking with you. It's been extraordinary for me too. Thank you.

[Music Playing]

PJ: Thanks for listening to Invictus Games Radio. For more information, visit: www.invictusgames2017.com.