



**Grateful American:
A Journey from Self to Service**
by Gary Sinise, with Marcus Brotherton

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Grateful American tells the story of how Gary Sinise became a dedicated advocate for military service men/women and their families, both active duty and Veterans, as well as first responders—law enforcement and fire fighters. The book is an autobiography and a journal of reflection by the author. He provides an engaging and readable account of his journey to serve, as a grateful American.

Sinise uses many touchpoints in his life to weave his story, beginning with his great-grandparents immigration from Italy to Chicago in 1891; his grandfather’s service in the U.S. Army during World War I; and his Uncle Jack’s service in World War II as a U.S. Navy B-17 navigator. His father, Robert Sinise, also served in the U.S. Navy, 1951-1955, as a photographer/film developer at the Naval Support facility in Anacostia, D.C. Sinise was born in 1955 while his father was still in the Navy and refers to being a “Navy brat—just barely.” Each of his reflections of his family members’ military service speak to his ever-increasing understanding of the cost of freedom in our country, and to those who selflessly protect that freedom.

Grateful American includes how Sinise became interested in acting during high school in the suburbs of Chicago, and the drama teacher who opened his eyes to a world of opportunity. He admits he was not a great student—he had trouble reading. He played sports in high school, but was injured, so music and playing in a rock band became his main interest. Then he gets his first acting role in the *West Side Story*, “I had been baptized. My life of purpose had begun.”

Interestingly, his movie career further inspired him to answer the call to serve, particularly his experience with *Forest Gump*. In making *Forrest Gump* in 1993 to 1994, he discovered what it must be like for many Vietnam Veterans, and it led him to volunteer for the Disabled American Veterans. It also eventually led him to form the “Lt. Dan Band.”

The two major events that greatly shaped Sinise’s view on “his calling to act” were the Vietnam War and 9/11. Sinise’s reflection on the Vietnam War started with his relatives who served in that war. Later when he met with Veteran organizations he realized they were never “Welcomed Home”—they were treated like the enemy, not heroes. Sinise’s 9/11 reflection was even more visceral, as he recalled the horrors our nation endured that September day he stated, “...September 11 broke my heart and changed me forever.”

In each of the chapters, Sinise focuses on his personal and professional development along life’s journey, and his continued reflection on the “calling to serve” beyond himself, for the greater good of our country. He includes a section of pictures in the book, tying his reflections to personal

photos. There is also a “Called to Action” section which lists the organizations and/or efforts he supported over the years, to include the musicians in the “Lt. Dan Band.” It is humbling to read how one American citizen has done so much to serve those protecting our way of life.

This is an inspiring read for any American—those who are already patriotic and grateful, as well as those who are confused by or indifferent to the positive focus on military/first responder’s service to our country. This book highlights the importance of the civil-military connection as a two-way equation. The average American civilian may take for granted the freedom and security we enjoy, but there is a real cost—it is the military and first responders who pay the greatest price with their lives and health. If only all Americans were as grateful.

Grateful American will interest a general readership, including those interested in Gary Sinise’s life as a celebrity, but especially for those who appreciate his many service projects over the past few decades, including the “Gary Sinise Foundation.” **IAJ**

Editor’s Note: Gary Sinise conducted a meet and greet at the Fort Leavenworth Post Exchange on February 25, 2019, to autograph copies of Grateful American. The event was co-hosted by the Exchange and the CGSC Foundation. In 2014, Sinise and his wife Moira endowed the “Lt. Col. Boyd McCanna ‘Mac’ Harris Leadership Award” at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in honor of his wife’s late brother. Lt. Col. Harris was inducted in the Fort Leavenworth Hall of Fame in May 2016. Receiving the honor for Harris were his wife, Anne Harris, and his brother-in-law Gary Sinise.

For the full stories and photos see:

<http://www.cgscfoundation.org/grateful-american-returns-to-fort-leavenworth>

<http://www.cgscfoundation.org/foundation-hosts-dinner-in-honor-of-sinise-family-new-leadership-award>

<http://www.cgscfoundation.org/they-were-soldiers>