



Jeff Key

Jeff Key is a writer, actor, activist, philanthropist and Iraq War veteran. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Theatre from the University of Alabama.

Jeff was born in Walker County, Alabama in 1965 and attended public school in the first generation of desegregated classes there. Jeff was profoundly affected by the racism still apparent in everyday life and, from a young age made efforts to do his part to eradicate it. He was raised by deeply religious parents. His mother, a social science teacher, tried her best to make him aware of the negative effects racism has and also to help him to understand the conflict in our country at that time over the Vietnam War. In 2000, at the age of 34, he went to Marine Corps boot camp and became a reserve marine. After the terrorist attacks of 2001, his unit made preparations for activation and in March, 2003, deployed to Eastern Iraq. Two months later, Jeff was flown back to the United States for surgery and because of his concerns about the things he had observed and because of his growing convictions that the coalition's tactics were ineffective in thwarting terrorism; he decided to leave the military.

On March 31, 2004, Jeff went on CNN as Paula Zahn's guest and used the ban on gays in the military to be discharged and to speak out in opposition to the occupation of Iraq. His straight buddies in the Marines had always known that he was gay but said nothing because his commitment to them and to the country was never in question. Jeff kept a journal while in Iraq, which he developed into the award winning and critically acclaimed one-man performance piece, *The Eyes of Babylon* (www.TheEyesOfBabylon.com). The play is his way of speaking out about a war that he has come to believe is immoral and illegal. Determined to keep true to the reasons he joined the Marines, he established The Mehadi Foundation (www.MehadiFoundation.org), a non-profit organization designed to help the veterans of this war, specifically those who attempt to self-medicate PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) with drugs and alcohol. Jeff, as of 2008, is eleven years clean and sober and has worked with hundreds of other alcoholics helping them (and him) stay sober.

The Mehadi Foundation (named for a young Iraqi boy Jeff met while there) also supports philanthropic efforts in Iraq to help Iraqi civilians. Although his ideas about violence (even state sponsored violence) as an effective tool for conflict resolution have changed, he is still deeply committed to defending defenseless people and supporting his fellow troops. Jeff now travels often speaking to high schools, businesses, colleges and universities, peace groups and churches on effective non-violent conflict resolution and continues to perform *The Eyes of Babylon* nationally and internationally. Jeff Key is the subject of a Showtime documentary entitled *Semper Fi: One Marine's Journey* that aired first on that network in June 2007 (www.SemperFiTheMovie.com). Two additional web sites of interest are myspace.com/the_eyes_of_babylon and <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1418291099&ref=profile>.

Jeff married Adam Nelson on August 4, 2007. They live in Salt Lake City, Utah with their two Labradors, Sydney and Willie.

Jeff Key participated in the Oral History of Utah Peace Activists project. His interview will soon be available at the UVU Library Archives.