

This Army Veteran had a breakthrough in therapy

Antonio: My name is Antonio, but people call me T.J. I was in the Army. I served from 1974 to 1977 in the regular Army and then I served in the Reserves until 1981. I came from the projects and the reason I joined is because there was just no future for me. My brother was a Vietnam Veteran. He came home; he was into heroine. So, the influences weren't there and I thought I just needed to get away so I volunteered.

In basic training it was pretty rough and I was stabbed in the back by some soldiers because I was on duty and I closed the day room and they didn't like that and we had a fight and I got stabbed. So, emotionally I just, sort of, backed up and stayed away from everybody after that.

When I went in, I had a lot of problems. I mean, I was an African American and I was gay, overweight, low esteem. I didn't know about alcoholism so I didn't think of myself as one. So, we were drinking during the day; after we go to the PX and the beer was too light so we'd go get more stuff and we drank constantly. When I got out, I continued as much as I could; as much as I could afford and a lot of people bought me drinks.

After that the drinking just got really bad, you know, and I only went to the VA because I was homeless, I was drinking, I had no future. They put me in an outpatient group. It was just an outpatient group of Veterans sitting in a circle talking about their problems. And during an outpatient group one of the counsellors suggested, they said, "This is not AA. This is a treatment facility. We think you should go to AA." and that's where my journey started.

The support I got from the VA after I started getting sober. They put me in a program and they followed up on me. I had a social worker. I went to the DAV; they started giving me disability money. They started diagnosing everything; the mental problems and everything connected to the service until one of the therapists came up with every time there's a small problem you bring all the baggage of your past into that problem.

If one thing happens. If somebody does something in traffic you start thinking about being poor, being black, being gay, being in the service, being stabbed. And I said, "That's ridiculous." And then one day it happened and I just got so angry and loud that I realized what she was talking about. I felt disrespected. I felt nobody's listening and we talked about that and that was one of the first breakthroughs I had.

Finding solutions, I learned that through AA, taking action, finding solutions. Even if it's a small solution. I talked to Veteran through my acting. I tell them my story through my acting and how I got back from the abyss of alcohol, drugs. And what I tell them is the empowerment of getting up in the morning. And that's the basic way to start, make your bed up, clean yourself up, take care of yourself. Clean yourself up, but we got to take care of ourselves too and we can't take care of anybody else if we don't take care of our self.



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