

Getting back on track in civilian life

Kris: I'm Kris, I did Army six years, two tours in Iraq. You join to travel, and then you just don't plan on traveling to Iraq or Afghanistan, but we got the word and then we just trained for it. I got excited for it. There's a separation anxiety from, you know, having your life and your day planned out for—like, I was doing training schedules for six months out. It's tough being around people that are completely opposite, I guess. You know, it's like going from a corporate position into a Mom & Pop store, like, you're not going to be able to function all that great right up or out of the bat, it's going to take you a while. Everybody else went on to college or they got married or they live elsewhere or whatever, but, you know, you just lose contact.

You know, the ones that are supposed to understand or the ones that are supposed to help you out and take care of you, they don't know what the hell's going on. They think you're coming back normal, you know, normal Kris, but they don't know that, you know, you've had to do all the stuff that doctors don't even do, like picking up shoulders that are completely blown off. Like, they don't understand any of that stuff, so it's trying to get them involved and teach them, but they don't—it's like they don't want to. They want to stay blind to the fact that, you know, somebody actually did what you see in movies and stuff, so that was the hardest part.

Being, uh, 28 and going to school with 18-year-olds. That's you know, they're just...they haven't done anything. You know, if there is somebody that's 24, 25, 26 years old I still don't feel as comfortable around them as I do with a Vet, and then, you know, just trying to get back to you and how you were, but you won't. Six years and two deployments, or even one deployment, you're not going to be the same. When you have the ability to drive into a car or, you know, take a car off the road there's an adrenaline rush that, you know, that's why they call us, what is it, adrenaline junkies, because nothing excites us anymore.

When I first got back, for the first six months or so I didn't even think of it. I was just on this high that I was free, and I could wake up at 9 o'clock, I didn't have to go running four or five miles in the morning and I can just do my own thing. I actually met a guy, an another Vet who kind of warmed me up to the going down to the VA and talking to people and getting help. He was wearing a t-shirt with the Second Marine Expeditionary Force, and I served with them in 2006, and so I got his attention and asked him if he was with the unit, and he just told me it was one of his buddy's shirts, and then we sat down and had a couple beers and started talking about the VA, and he has been doing, compensation claims with the VA, so he kind of got me started with that and then set me up with one of the doctors and brought me down there to get the health insurance and everything, because we get it for, like, four years, five years after we get out, so he set me up with that.

I was completely oblivious to everything, and then that, when I sat down with the doctor there I kind of realized, like, you know, there's stuff that, you know, I need to deal with instead of just pushing it back and not thinking about it, and then, the big one is just the mental health and sitting down with a psychiatrist weekly and talking with them in and in the group of vets that go down there too, so. We've had upwards of 20 people, but usually it's about eight to ten, and then there's two or three psychiatrists and they start off the conversation asking how somebody was and then, you know, everything just kind



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of webs out of that. You just share stories and experiences and, you know, from deployments and then everyday life.

School's going fine, I'm about to graduate here in about four months, just about, so life's pretty good, but I still have to deal with, you know, all this other stuff from years ago on top of, you know, homework and getting all the papers written and, you know, doing research and stuff, but, you know, it's nothing I can't handle.

I think the hardest part is just going down to the hospital and you know, telling somebody that you need help. They're not going to judge you and if anything they're just going to appreciate you for, you know, having the maturity to just come in and say you have issues or you need help. Just go to the VA. They're there to help you.



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