

That meeting saved my life

Richard: My name is Richard, and I'm a U.S. Navy Veteran. I served from 1986-1989, and I was deployed on two West Pacs in different areas. I was hanging out in Compton. I wasn't doing anything, wasn't working. I was the party guy. I always wanted to go to a party, smoking weed, drinking, cocaine, which eventually led to crack cocaine. My life was just spiraling out of control. Hanging out with the wrong people and at the last end, I was like, "I can't do this anymore," and so I went down to the recruiting station and signed up for the Navy. The experience was great in the military. I felt like I belonged to something.

When I got out of the military, I felt lost, because there wasn't that comradery and all the people around you. So, after six months when I got out, a buddy of mine lived in Indianapolis, Indiana, so I went to Indianapolis and lived. I continued to drink and then the cocaine started coming around. I brought the same behaviors to Indianapolis that I tried to leave in California. I figured if I'd get away and go someplace else, things would change, but you always take you with you. Everything I did, it consisted of just drinking. I'd wind up getting a good job at Indiana University Hospital. I would go there every morning with a hangover. People at work would be like, "You can't keep coming here like this." I lost my job in 2004 and everything just went downhill from there. I didn't pay the mortgage. I just drank and did drugs and stayed up in the house with the blinds closed all the time. I lost the house, moved back in with my mom. I was just drinking the whole issues away and doing drugs. I was lost; I was lonely; I felt like nobody cared, almost to the point I didn't even really want to live anymore.

I went down to the VA in Long Beach and I told the lady, "I just need somebody to talk to because it's like life is just getting next to me." The lady said, "Do you have a drinking problem?" And I'm like, "No," and she looked at me like, yeah, right, you know, because I saw it on her face. They recommended me to go to group, so I began going to group at SATC. SATC is a substance abuse program for Veterans. They do everything they can to keep you from using. It was a challenge though, sitting there amongst all these people. I was scared to open up because I didn't want people to know the things I have done and things that people had done to me, but there was a lot of people out there, a lot of Veterans who were just like me. It gave me a chance to get a lot of stuff I had stuffed way down inside, to get all this stuff up out of me and to talk about it. That meeting saved my life.

I'm going on nine years of sobriety September 9th. If it's a bad day or things aren't going the way I want them to go that day, it's okay, it's okay. We'll get through this day. I thought that once you got sober it wouldn't be any fun; you're not going to have any fun. There is so much fun out there in sobriety. There's conventions, there's dances, there's parties, there are barbecues, and the only thing is nobody is drinking.

I was sitting on my job and I'm just sitting on this job and I'm doing the same thing every day on this job, and I said, "I want to go to school. I'm going to go to school." Just this bright idea just like, go to school, and I was like, oh, my God. I don't think I'm going to be able to do this, and here I am into my third year and I make the dean's list. And it was just like, "I can't believe this." I can almost cry because I never thought I was smart enough. I just never had that much confidence in myself. I'm so glad that my mom has had a chance to see me sober because she's seen me at my worst and to hear my mom tell me, "Oh, I'm so proud of you. You made the dean's list," well, life is good.



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I went through the whole spectrum. I went from nearly homelessness, drugs, alcohol, and here I am today and I wouldn't give up my sobriety for nothing. You don't have to drink; you don't have to do drugs. Go to the nearest VA hospital, they are more than willing to help you. Give it a chance to work and you can get a lot of help.



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