

Alcohol's not the first thing on his mind anymore

Michael: My name's Michael. I was in the Army from 1969 to 1972. I served in Kansas and in Vietnam, 15 months in Vietnam. The Vietnam Veterans, when we came back from Vietnam it wasn't very popular to be a soldier. They blamed us for the war, which is neither here nor there. So, a lot of them don't talk about it even to this day. It was a tough burden to carry back then because when I first came back, I had to hide the fact that I was in Vietnam for the first 10 years. I didn't put it on a job application or anything like that. If they didn't ask for it, I didn't tell them.

When you're in the service you think, "Oh, when I get out, I can do this; I'll be free." But you don't understand that your life is going to change because the regimentation is gone. When you get out that regimentation is not there and there is a re-acclimation period that you're going to have to go through. I didn't realize I had post-traumatic stress until six, eight months down the road after I came back, actually a couple years. I realized, "Man, my thinking is all screwed up here. What's going on?" It's because of all the things I had to bury when I came back and keep inside me.

I mean, you can talk to the people close to you but, once again, they don't know; they don't get it. You just learn to live with it and realize you have it and a lot of times, of course, I'd use alcohol and just bury it again; along with other drugs of course. Everything I did, I had to make sure I had enough alcohol for it. You know, I can't run out of beer before the job is done or we're going to party, we've got to make sure we've got enough alcohol for it.

I had to retire because of my back, my lower back. I got (SSD) Social Security Disability and I retired. I figured, "Oh good, I'm retired now." But I didn't take up some other kind of an interest. You know, either community service or a hobby or something to occupy my time. Next thing I know, I'm drinking every damn day, every day. I was getting sick all the time; not eating right and attitude, of course, it's going to affect your attitude all the time. Like I said, and then I got busted and I said, "Man, this has got to stop. I'm getting a little too old for this stuff. I got to be a man about it and get some courage and quit being a coward and do something about it."

And the Veteran's treatment program has been very helpful. It's the first time I've been in a program sponsored by anybody that actually cared. They actually cared what happened to me. They give you all the tools that you could possibly need to get yourself out of whatever addiction you're in. I'm going once a month now and they want to know how you're doing; how your life is; what your interests are and how you're coming along; are you happy or are you sad; is there something else that we can do for you? I can't stress it enough is the fact that they actually care and that makes a big difference in recovery.

Now these days I look forward to going to it; I met some really good people. I've realized now that there is a life and a lifestyle without alcohol. I think back on it now and I didn't realize it. Alcohol's not the first thing on my mind anymore. I mean, I don't get up thinking what I got to do before I can get down to the pub. I get up now wondering, "What else can I do or get done today or how could I help somebody?" Your attitude on life just changes completely when you realize you don't have to have alcohol to live or to enjoy yourself.



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There are so many organizations wanting to help, but you got to want it. So, if I do run across someone that's having problems with it, that's what I tell them. Get down to your nearest VA representative in your area and they can steer you towards whether it be a medical center or any other health organizations that are around. There's good in all of us and the longer you stay sober, the more good's going to happen; when you look for good, you're going to find it.



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