

Fellow Veterans Connected Rich to Recovery

Rich: My name is Rich, I came on active duty in the US Army in May 2001, got assigned to the 82nd Airborne division shortly after September 11. I was assigned to 3rd battalion, 325th airborne infantry regiment and I was a chemical officer. There were a couple of incidents in Iraq one where one of our guys lost both of his legs and his left arm below the elbow and another one of our guys was mortally wounded and we lost him. For a long time I blamed myself for his death.

I really didn't want to get out of the Army. My ex-wife didn't jive well with the Army and with the Army environment so she kind of influenced me to get out. Her home of record was Pennsylvania. So I went to Pennsylvania. I started working various jobs. I worked at the military school where I got commissioned out of which was a great experience, but she was never really happy with anything and I think that period of instability for me kind of fueled the fire.

I didn't adjust well. Whether it was going to the mall and being in crowds or being in a movie theatre that was 80% full or being in a restaurant where I had to sit with my back to the wall. It was during that time that it was towards the tail end of my first marriage where I started drinking heavily. Sleep definitely impacted the frequency of my alcohol consumption. Driving down 128 going to work, driving under an overpass you go right back to it. You seem some garbage on the side of the road you don't know is that an IUD. I had a couple of brushes with law enforcement. I had been pulled over and had me dismount my vehicle and he sat down and talked with me for about a half hour to 45 minutes and said "Look, you know I was in the service, I understand what is going on, but you need to, this is it, this is your sign right here."

I just had a moment of clarity one day and I got roped into a bunch of veteran's organizations and in my home town the predominant members of those organizations were Vietnam Vets and they identified what was happening in me with what had happened to them when they came home from Vietnam and a couple of them I was very lucky engaged me, pulled me aside and said "Hey look, we know what you are doing, we have been there, we have done it, we know where you are coming from. We are not telling you how to live your life but based off of our lessons learned you need to re-evaluate and re-assess what you are doing."

I did, and I stopped drinking and got help. In ramping up to my second marriage my wife and I engaged a counseling element in the VA health care system. We were very lucky and we met a fantastic woman named Grace and it just worked. She compartmentalized everything. You know the disassociation from the isolation, the numbness. She broke things down and then explained them and kind of took in what I told her, then she turned it round and fired it back at me at said "Check this out. This is what you just told me, this is what you need to shoot for and these are milestones that you can set in between to get you from point A to point B."

The interesting thing with couples counseling is simultaneously when she is giving me this guidance I am hearing my wife's take on things and it helps to kind of close the gap and sync things up. It has been tremendous. It really works.

I had a veteran in my hometown who was a case on with the Marine Corp and he said to me what did it for him was he realized one day that he was dishonoring the memory of



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

the Marines that he had fought along side of and that the best thing that he could do was to live his life as best as he could for the life that they couldn't live anymore.

So the best thing that I can do is talk to others and impart what I know and what my experience was to just illustrate the fact that there is always a way out. The sooner you get on it, and get after it and learn how to manage it you know the better off you are going to be.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION