

I get to have joy in my life again

Fred: I don't know what the next chapter is yet. I really don't. But I'm not done yet. My name's Fred. I served in the Army for 22 years. I served most of my career as an Army aviator in 15 Alpha flying scout helicopters and then Black Hawks.

So I served in Operation Desert Storm. I lost one of my air crews during the air war. We had eight actual assigned casualties during Desert Storm. 30,000 of us participated. Unfortunately, I was one of the few guys that lost some of my men, and it had a huge impact on me. It was challenging. It was a mission I was supposed to fly and they went instead of me.

And when you deal with that kind of trauma for 20 years, you really build some strategic barriers to keep yourself protected and keep people away. My wife, she saw it all, and she knew, and she was sort of a lifeguard. When I really was struggling, she was the one stepped in and said, "You need to go see a doctor."

I was suicidal. So I did. I went and saw a therapist. I was eventually diagnosed with PTSD and really survivor's guilt. But you've got to remember in the '90s, we really didn't, if PTSD was a thing, we didn't talk about it, and survivor's guilt was not a thing. So I just thought I was depressed and I had troubles and I acted out when I was struggling.

When you think so lowly of yourself, you tend to try and overachieve. All these things I was doing to achieve, CEO, award winner, speaker, this, that, all this narcissism that went into that was really all just trying to make myself feel better about who I was as a person because I let these men die.

I was very fortunate to have a therapist who saw through my BS very quickly. And all these things you're doing, these behaviors you're doing are all just to cover up what's really going on here.

It was really powerful to have a therapist who understood, not just trauma and PTSD, but also the nuance of the overachievers who try to hide it. He's the one that got me turned on to what I needed to do as far as unpacking the things I had done to cover up my trauma and then was the lifesaver who did EMDR with me.

It's a trauma focused therapy. The theory, I believe, is that it processes these trauma memories as normal memories. When we talk about the trauma and we pull that thread, and really I only had about five or six sessions. I mean, not very many. And I saw within weeks, suicidal ideas, I didn't even notice they're gone. I had nursed it for so long. It was just gone, which is really a blessing.

I think the biggest gift I got from taking the risk and seeking treatment is joy. I can see joy that joy is an emotion that can be a part of my life again. I think that by far is the biggest gift of my treatment is that I get to have joy in my life again, and I didn't before. Take the risk, do the hard work, and get help.



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