

VA helped me help myself

Stuart: My name's Stuart and I served in the United States Navy from '86 to '92. I really enjoyed it and when it came time for me to make a choice about reenlisting or not reenlisting, I chose not to. And, reflecting on it here lately, there were a lot more good times than bad times obviously but the bad times were really stressful, really, really physically exhausting, mentally exhausting. You know trying to come to grips with the fact that the side of my engine room could blow in at any moment and I just had to kinda wrap my head around that and do my job anyway.

When I first came back, I was very angry at myself, angry at everybody, at the wife I had at the time. I would just blow up for no reason. I was drinking really heavily pretty much on a constant basis and I surrounded myself with other people who also drank heavily, indulged in drugs.

I was on a really heavy drinking binge one night and my wife had already had me thrown in jail before for public intoxication, cursing at her, cursing at my daughter, really inappropriate behavior. And my wife in her wisdom, decided to call the VA and ask if they had some kind of program that would help me help myself to get away from the alcohol. And even in my blind, drunk stupor at the time, I remember my wife handing me the phone, she handed me her cell phone and she says, "Here this is the lady from the VA, she needs to talk to you." The lady on the other end of the line says, "Do you need some help with your drinking?" And just in a moment of clarity I was like "Yeah, I do."

I completed the 28-day program. I lost a lot of stuff. My golf clubs went into pawn, my guitars went into pawn, you know all my toys and stuff, I lost a bunch of those. But I gained myself back and that's worth more than anything. I was able to look myself in the mirror and say, alright, you needed help, you got some help, way to go. And it was awesome.

I've talked to Psychiatrists about the stresses of being in the combat situations that I was in and help worked through those. Understand why I turned to drugs and alcohol. You're treated with respect and dignity and courtesy and if you need to talk to a Psychiatrist or Psychologist or Doctors, they're always available to talk to you. A lot of the staff up there are Veterans, Combat Veterans. So, they know the where's and the what's and how to identify and how to relate.

There were tons of different tools and things that I learned when I was in the counseling classes and even now I still go to a process group once a week. And a lot of those have to do with, how to deal with anxiety, how to basically rebuild your life in a nondrinking, non-drug addicted way. And I loved going to it. It's a great bunch of guys, our facilitator is great.

As far as me personally, since I got out of the 28-day program, I've gone back to college, I just completed my second semester of like pre-med classes and got a GPA of a 3.64 now.

I decided to change me. I wasn't happy with the way I was. I was not proud of who I had become. And, I realized that I have an opportunity right now to get my act together and move forward in a positive way and there's no shame in asking for help. There's no



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shame in asking for extra ammo when you're in a foxhole. There's no shame in utilizing your resources. There's no shame in getting the help you need, when you need it.



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