

Today I welcome the day in

Vernon: My name is Vernon. I served in the United States Army between 1980 and 1983. I was injured in a training accident in Panama. I rolled down a 25 foot cliff. I spent 30 days in a coma. I had 375 sutures in my face. I kept reliving that incident of rolling down that cliff, rolling down that cliff, rolling down that cliff. The day never ended. It kept going over. I would be sleeping and I'd wake up screaming. Nightmares. I started self-medicating. The pain killers weren't doing it and I started using cocaine. I tested positive. It just so happened they shipped me back home. It was then end of my career in the military.

Civilian atmosphere? Wow it was a culture shock. By then my addiction was full blown. I would keep a job just long enough to support my habit. I went to prison for my drug addiction. After I got out of prison I felt like I was a monster. I used to stay in my room and keep it as dark as possible. My step daughter came and she said "Don't you think you need to go back to the hospital? You're no fun anymore. You just lay back here in this dark room. You won't play with me. You won't do anything." And when she said that, just the look of despair and concern that was on a child's face, that's when I really knew I needed to do something.

All day long I would admit that I was an alcoholic and drug addict but I refused to admit for a time that I had a mental health issue. At the Tucson VA, they had a group that was called SARTP, which is Substance Recovery Therapy Program. It was dealing with my mental health illness and my substance abuse. When I started addressing both of them as one, that's when the light bulb came on.

The nightmares started to cease. They started to not have as much power over me. Every morning I'd get up and I'd open the blinds because that used to be my cave. You know, that used to be my hiding place. So today I welcome the day in. I take my psych meds as prescribed, I do a little bit of physical work out, and I also do something spiritual. I'm very involved in my church and giving back to the community. The money I was spending on drugs and alcohol- we now have a house, two cars, and that's amazing.

I have a wonderful wife and she's been so supportive. She can tell if I start getting too quiet. "What's going on?" And I need that. I'm a pretty good dad today. We do fun things together. I'm reliving my childhood with her. She's my little buddy. For someone to love me like that- I always thought I was unlovable. But I'm lovable today.

It takes a strong man to ask for help. You're not asking for a handout. You're asking for a hand up. Find a counselor or contact your local VA and ask for help. That's the only way it gets started.



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