

## Staying Grounded

**Vernon:** We have a common denominator. We serve. I'm Vernon. I grew up in the military. From 1980 to 1986 I was a tactical wireman/infantryman.

In 1981 I was in a training accident. I rolled down a 25-foot cliff. I was in a coma for 30 days. When I came out, I had 375 sutures in my face. I started having the nightmares. I started self-medicating. My addiction was full-blown. Thank God for the Tucson VA medical center. I started to seek help, not just for my drug addiction, but also for my mental health. When I started addressing both of them as one, that's when the light bulb came on. I refuse to allow my illness to hold my future prisoner. One of the counselors told me you're not broken.

Somebody helped me and reached out to me. If you are a veteran, you don't have to go through it alone.

My church is very supportive. My wife is very supportive. My family and I, we've come together. I go fishing. We bowl. To watch my stepdaughter knocking down the pins helps me stay rooted. I hope they get something out of it. I think they do it just for me.

I'm a Tucson Unified School District Crossing Guard. I stand on the corner waving every morning. Do you know how many people have just stopped, just waving? People say, "Hey, I can't wait to get to this corner." That's where I get my self-worth, to touch their lives just a little bit. I used to stay in that dark cave, but to be out here celebrating life, that gives me freedom. I got other veterans through the process. They can get help and it's available free of charge. Life will start to make sense again



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