

They called it a hard, hard landing...

Interviewee: The Navy called it a hard, hard landing. We called it a crash. That was where my back had originally gotten hurt. I was in pain the whole time there but I had to push through it. It got worse, steadily worse. They diagnosed me also as PTSD and what they call, "residual brain injury." To this day I'm in pain every day. It's nothing they can do, the nerve damage. It's hard to walk. I have a wheelchair; I hate it. I don't use it that much; I use my crutches and go as far as I can. You just suck up the pain and just go on every day.

I didn't do good with any of this. I started drinking a lot. You just have memories or thoughts that pop in your head and sometimes I'm somewhere else. It's like one big movie running through your head and I would just remember things, not just from the last deployment but then from years ago when I was in. And things just all rambled together. The problem is when a person drinks too much, at least for me, once I got home was trying to sleep, that's when it all came back ten folds.

It was rough for me after I got back. I had lost my father-in-law that I knew for 26 years. I was going through a divorce and then a month after I got back my mother ended up dying. So, I had to go home, buried her and then get back to San Diego. Emotionally I was a mess, dealing with all that and PTSD and physical pain. When I got out I had absolutely no support; nobody that I knew was around. None of my buddies were there and it was like starting all over again.

The drinking really got bad but what got me under control of that was when I finally ended up moving in with my kids and becoming a single dad. Having to put them first. Bills had to be paid. If it was not for my children, I'm not sure what I would've done. But inside I knew, "Okay, if I did anything, well, my kids still need me."

It was really hard when I finally called for help. I will say one thing, the commercials or the little stickers they have as far as calling the Veterans lines. When they say, "It takes the strength of a warrior." They're not kidding because it is very hard and it takes a lot of strength to actually make that call and you hope that you're going to get somebody that's a Vet or somebody you can talk to. I melted down a few times and I needed to talk to someone.

It's good that that's there to be able to do that. I keep in touch with other Veterans now with my battle buddy I've known while we were over there. And while we were there, I always told everybody, "He kept me alive; I kept him alive." We stay in touch with each other about once a week sometimes more. I can call him for anything. He is my support. It seems like Vets still rely on Vets. And the VA, they're there, they're there to help us and don't think that it's being weak. It's being weak not to reach out.

That's the great thing about talking to another Vet, find out how they got through it and they can help you. Our best support is each other. That's what I love about going to the VA is that if I get confused or lost in the hospital there's another Vet that will come up and ask me if I need help and I do the same thing. The Vets help each other.



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