

A Vet Center helps a Vietnam Vet get on course

John: My name is John. I was drafted into the US Army in 1968, spent a year in Vietnam in '69 and '70. I left Vietnam and in three-day time I was back here in Chicago and it was all over. So one day you're in Vietnam, the next day you're in Chicago. At that time there was a lot of protests, particularly here in Chicago. I struggled with nightmares. I'd wake up in a cold sweat. I had a lot of, believe it or not, guilt, survivor guilt. I was very jumpy. I didn't like being around people, so I would go out of my way to kind of isolate myself. I had big problems with noise. I told myself that Vietnam didn't affect me at all, and I'd tell my family and my friends, "Don't worry about me, Vietnam didn't affect me," but ultimately I guess I just wouldn't admit to it.

I drank a lot, and I drank for 25 years. Finally, my wife gave me an ultimatum that I had to stop or get out, so I joined AA. Currently I haven't had a drink in 14 years. Immediately after stopping the booze, the depression was there, and my wife finally, again, said, "John, you've got to do something about this," and so we went to my doctor and he says, "John, you need some help, and you probably need a psychiatrist," and so I didn't—I couldn't afford a psychiatrist, so I went to the Oak Park Vet Center and I met Brian and he's my counselor, and I've been seeing him on a weekly basis ever since, and he's been terrific.

What's gotten better is that the counseling has made me aware of things that went right over my head before. So I am trying more, okay? And I'm trying because I want to. They're teaching me to talk more. Talk to my wife, talk to my kids, and about subjects, you know that I'm having a hard time with, and so that's kind of cool.

Vietnam vets that I would talk with generally are unaware of the help that they could get, and they don't necessarily—like I was, they don't necessarily want to take that step. The help is there. Talk. Get it out, and it makes you feel better.



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