

## Opening up to overcome PTSD

**Jim:** My name is Jim. I served in the United States Army for almost seven years, from 1967 until 1974. I was in the Army on an Air Force base because that was the largest bombing practice range in the world at that time. We were a 30-man Army unit running the Port of Tripoli, so they had a lot of Air Force from every different allied country coming in there to practice. For anyone who's never experienced artillery rounds or heavy explosives, you can't describe that feeling. It hurts in your bones. It's experiencing a fear that you can't describe or share with anybody, and you honestly think your life is coming to an end. At that time, we didn't have PTSD; it was never defined as such.

To have our own countrymen greet us as if we were the enemy, that broke my heart in ways I can't define. At first, I ran away from it. I tried to hide from it. I didn't want to feel that way. It was pretty easy to go out and get drunk repeatedly. In fact, it became a matter of course. And particularly shortly after 'Nam, like most of us, I had dreams and nightmares, and as my life was disintegrating and I just felt like I was on a track to suicide, I said, "Hey, this has got to stop."

I've gone through three marriages in my life. It's just been one thing after another, and I could never open up and communicate enough that my wives felt like I was trusting them. I kept everything bottled up. When my Psychiatrist informed me that I fit the bill for PTSD and diagnosed me as such, I was rather surprised, because I was always the guy that other guys came to deal with their issues. But sitting down and talking with, my Psychiatrist and Psychologists, allowed me to express myself and say, "Well, hey, I'm a little bit angry with myself." At first, I was very reserved. I was unable to really open up. It's not easy for us to look inside ourselves. To tell somebody, "Open up," [laugh] that's easy to say, but they just, not that easy to do.

Fortunately, by talking, by listening, we were able to identify my triggers, if you will, the things that were influencing my time and my anger. I'm really grateful for that and I want to be able to pass that along to someone else, but I want to encourage other people to help too, that I do think that that's one of the best therapies for someone who's dealing with their own issues is to help somebody else step up.



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