

Finding strength through the support of peers

Major Ed: My names Major Ed. I served 19 years and 2 months in the United States Army. We received a call that we would be operating in a new base. I never thought that on that day that I would be the casualty of choice. I would be hit by an improvised explosive device, a roadside bomb that would change my life forever.

First fragment would hit my knee and break it in three places, fragments to the left side of my body, I was in trouble, spent 17 hours in surgery, blood transfusions. I'd wake up 3 days later, I would end up having five surgeries and then I would go to Walter Reed and then finally transferred to Brooke Army Medical Center.

My leg was amputated on October 1, 2004. When the leg was taken away this overwhelming feeling of hopelessness set in. As I looked at those machines I was like, what happens if I just turn them off. But I looked at this wall and I saw a picture of Jesus, and as a man of faith I was looking at that and I was like, wow, my faith is being tested right now. I thought to myself, I can't do this to my family. I either give up or I move on. It was my day to move forward in recovery, but all of those symptoms would not go away. They would carry on and I would learn about these symptoms as I would go through my recovery.

Depression, the rollercoaster ride, the anxiety, the hopelessness, the grief, the uncontrollable thought process of not being able to have any control of my life. I received counseling down at Fort Sill, Oklahoma from a counselor. She told me that I needed to write things down, to put together kind of like a diary of the thoughts that I was going through and whether they were the thoughts of depression, of the PTSD, and all of the symptoms that I just discussed but it was about the fact that this was understanding my new life as I moved forward.

My friend, George, would be my therapist. George would come in, he would talk to me, he would talk to me about posttraumatic stress, but I think the most important thing that I gained from all of those things was the peer-to-peer support.

What I gained from these other service members who had gone through their challenges was the fact that you know what, they're in prosthetic legs, they're moving on, they have the same demons in their thought processes that maybe I had. They've experienced negativity, but now it's either being positive in this recover or being in this dark hole that I call this wound of war that you don't want to be in, and that's what I'd tell a lot of service members, that you know what, when you come back it's okay to say that you've been changed but it's also okay to understand who you've changed to.

As a service member and a defender of freedom always remember that you have to be mentally, physically, and wellness fit to continue to live your life after this horrific activity that we've all been involved with. Because, at the end of today it is my motto, mission first, people always and when you think about it in that regard, we take care of each other, seek help, get help because together we'll make a difference.



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