

A Father's Journey

Jeff: Looking back, I think I was looking for a way out of all the pain. My name is Jeff. I was in the US Army. Medical Sergeant from 2002, until 2014, had a one-year break in service. I've been to Iraq. I've been to Afghanistan. When I got back, I just noticed that I didn't quite fit in with civilians anymore. I didn't realize just how much damage had been done to my head.

The isolation, the lack of an ability to relate. There was a lot of drunken nights. I spent probably nine months in an alcohol induced fog. There were mornings I woke up wondering how in the world I got home. At one point in time, I was put on an involuntary hold in a mental hospital. My life got turned upside down and got put under a microscope.

I was a drug addict. I was homeless. I got kicked out of the military, but all that shaped who I am now. And I'm like, okay, something's got to change. A lot of influence by my wife led me to the VA. Figured I'd give a shot. It was a forum that, whether I wanted to hear it or not, made me deal with a lot of the issues that I hadn't talked about before. That not even members of my own family knew I had been through.

I met a counselor who worked there. She'd also had experience with military members, with special operations members. They've been really patient with me. They've helped me out a lot. I noticed a difference within about two weeks that actually showed me the true extent of the damage to my brain. And I appreciate that. I still do to this day.

It provides me with the motivation and reinforcement every day to continue doing the right thing. As hard and as trying as it was, I'm actually grateful that I went through it all. Every single day in the ICU, I take people that are on the brink of death, and I have a hand in helping bring them back into life.

My temperament calmed down quite a bit. Now when I speak to addicts, they perk up. They listen. When I talk to vets, their guards come down. I got my kids back. We are a lot closer than we ever have been. I would not have been where I'm at now. I probably still would've been on the streets if it wasn't for them. The VA helped me out tremendously because it allowed me to come out not only as a better person, but as a better father. And that's the most important thing, I think.



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