

A Marine's journey of recovery after TBI and PTSD

Interviewee: My name is Max and I served in the United States Marine Corps from 2002 to 2007. I started out as just part of a squad and moved up to a team leader, and I deployed twice to a combat zone. We got blown up 12 times, and the only reason we knew that is because we actually literally marked on our, our dashes how many times we had gotten hit, and out of the 12 times I had gotten knocked out 9 of them.

It was really, really hard to transition. My family didn't understand what I was going through. I would drink all the time. I had these feelings of anger and these feelings that I didn't understand, and instead of being sober and wanting to know why, I numbed it and I, inside, feel ashamed, you know? It's like, I felt like nobody understands really what I went through, like that was a really dark time in my life.

Secluding yourself is a really, really big one. You have that feeling that nobody understands. Getting into really, really big crowds and kind of feeling your heart race and thinking that something bad is going to happen and you almost like feel like anybody that looks at you, you want to fight with.

When I got to Boise, I actually didn't go to the VA for the first 6 months because I didn't know what was entitled to and I didn't understand it, but I went down to the VA and I had my DD214 and the people there were really nice. The doctors have made sure that I've either gotten, whether it be medical treatment, therapy, trying to mix everything together.

So at the Vet center, when I came there, I was afraid because of the stigmatism. You always hear, like, people coming in, getting counselling, "Oh, you don't need counselling. You're a Marine. You don't need that." But instead I've taken it and I've, and I've talked to a bunch of other guys that have kind of turned around and done the same thing is that when you do have PTSD, it gives you the availability to be able to sit there and talk with people and understand, with the counsellors at the Vet center, that you can understand those negative cycles and get out of them and understand that what you went through and what you were trained with makes you that way, and you can change that if you're aware that's what's happening.

The hardest thing that I had to overcome was when I started going to school again. I had to relearn a lot of things with my brain injury, because I have like a short-term memory issue. So I had to learn, through the VA, how to do things and how to use those little tricks.

I just kept trying, like... I didn't want to give up because in the Marine Corps, I never gave up—even when it got hard and then I made the mistakes that I did, I never wanted to quit. And that was the one thing I was the proudest of is when I was able to get past something and say, "This is who I am. And this is how I got here and now I'm a senior at a university on the honor roll."

Life's gotten a lot better. I have found that controlling my anger and not being so upset, I can still stay a little bit rational with what I'm dealing with. But more often it's, you know, sitting down and making sure that I'm going to be a good husband and I'm going to be a good student or just a good person, because I don't want to dishonor what I've done and I don't want to dishonor the things that guys around me have done. So when I say I was in the United States Marines or I served our country, I want to hold that.



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It's been nice to have the support of the VA, the Vet center, non-profit organizations that have, have really stepped up to help Veterans. The important thing that I, that I try to tell everybody that I meet, because I understand, is, is that if you can find that purpose, whether it's in a higher being or if it's just helping other people around you, one person can make that difference.



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